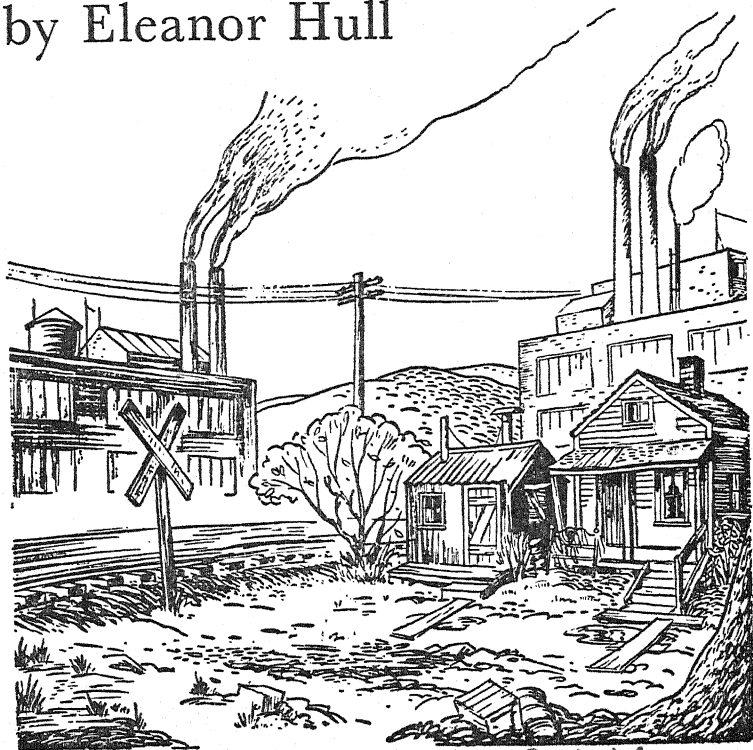


THE THIRD WISH

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by Eleanor Hull

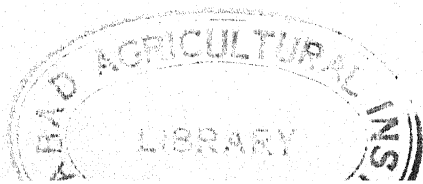


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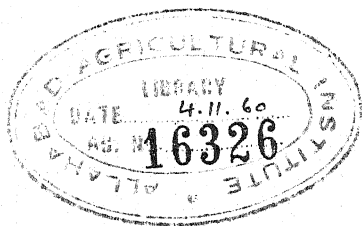
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TO DAD

*who loves little, new, friendly
churches . . .*



CHAPTER ONE

Bart Poole ran across the clear green rectangle of the football field, waving toward the grandstands, and the stands roared back in greeting and enthusiasm. Long, lanky Bart, with his freckled face, button nose, and ready grin, was West End High's most able athlete, and most popular senior as well.

"Rah, Bart, rah, Poole, rah, rah, Bart Poole!"

Everybody in the stadium was happy. Everybody was glad to be there under the bright blue autumn sky, yelling

for his team, anticipating victory in the big game tomorrow. Everybody but one.

Dorinda Poole thrust her hands up her brown sweater sleeves and shivered. She was the one. It was her brother they were yelling for, and she shivered partly because she was excited, but mostly because she was lonely. She was a freshman, attending her first football rally, and she had to sit all alone because her best friend Libby had moved to St. Louis just the week before.

She knew some of the other freshmen. A whole row of them, who had gone to the same grammar school, sat directly behind her, wildly triumphant at being high school students at last. Dorinda thought they were acting awfully silly, as usual, and besides, she knew they considered her queer. They hadn't had much to do with her for years.

The other members of the team followed Bart across the field, each one being lustily cheered, and then the three jumping-jack cheer leaders in their scarlet and white suddenly stopped jumping, became unnaturally dignified, and lifted their hands for quiet. Everyone stood and solemnly sang the school song. Dorinda felt lonelier than ever. Oh, why had Lib had to go away? Together they could have enjoyed everything so much, giggling over the stuck-up airs of the upperclassmen and the greenness of the other freshmen and all the many funny things they always found to talk about. They could have sung this sentimental song about "Dear Old West End High" with straight faces, only exchanging ironic glances

because they were not, and didn't care to be, part of it all.

"Hi, Dorinda!" somebody called down to her as the rally broke up. Dorinda saw Mary Ann Grieve two benches above her, along with a crowd of others. Libby and Dorinda always referred to Mary Ann as "Sugar 'n Spice," and Libby had made up a verse about her:

"Sugar 'n Spice
Is really *too* nice!"

"Dorinda? What a name!" one of the other girls said, not too low for Dorinda to hear. She was a cute girl, with fluffy blonde hair. Mary Ann always went around with the most attractive people.

Mary Ann answered, "Hush! That's Bart Poole's sister."

Dorinda turned away hastily from the interested look she knew was coming. That was how it always was. First her funny name, and then "Bart Poole's sister."

On a day like this, of course, it was rather thrilling to be Bart Poole's sister. The trouble was, she didn't feel so much as if she was his sister any more. He was nice enough to her — never teased her nor tripped her nor told on her the way he had for a while. But he never told her things any more either nor wanted to go anywhere with her. Sometimes she wondered if he even remembered the events of their childhood that had seemed so terrifically important to them both, things like the coming of Captain, their adorable brown-and-white puppy, and his sorrowful demise six years later.

Dorinda wondered what Bart was going to do tonight. Maybe, just maybe, he'd go to a show with her. In anticipation of this possibility, she hurried home.

Dorinda's house was much like all the others for blocks around, well built and comfortable, with a neat lawn guarded by two tall elms. But now the leaves were thick on the grass, although Dorinda remembered hearing Dad tell Bart days ago to rake them up.

As soon as Dorinda opened the door she heard her mother singing and clattering around the kitchen. She could smell dinner; an appetizing aroma of onions and gravy filled the house.

"Bart?" called Mother, poking her head through the kitchen door. "Oh, Dorinda. Come in and tell me all about the rally."

Dorinda went into the clean, cluttered kitchen and perched on a stool. Her mother, taking a bowl of eggs off the top of the refrigerator with one hand while she connected the electric mixer with the other, looked at her, taking her in from the top of her curly red head to her narrow brown oxfords. Mother had the same aware and merry glance that made Bart so popular, seeming to take anyone she talked with entirely into her confidence.

"Did you have a good time? Whom did you sit with?" she asked.

Dorinda shrugged. "Oh, myself," she said.

"You miss Lib, don't you?" her mother asked. "And yet — it may be better for you in the long run that she's gone."

"You never liked her," said Dorinda coldly, swallowing a lump in her throat.

"Oh, yes, I did." Her mother patted Dorinda's unresponsive shoulders. "I did like Lib. Only she was so sarcastic — didn't seem to want to be nice to anybody but you. . . . Well, did they cheer for Bart?"

"Oh, of course. More than for anybody else."

Her mother's round face under the braided black hair glowed with pleasure. "Of course, they did," she agreed delightedly. "Why wouldn't they? Well, set the table now, will you, Dorinda? It's time for the boys to be showing up."

With compressed lips, Dorinda took silver from the drawer. It seemed so silly of Mother to call Dad and Bart "the boys."

Dad, of course, was on time. He drew his car to a stop precisely at the end of the walk and closed its door firmly without slamming. As he came in, he gave Dorinda an absent-minded pat on the red head that was so much like his own and unfurled the newspaper.

"Dinner's ready," said Mother, coming from the kitchen with a plate of steaming muffins and a becoming dash of flour on her cheek. "Where's that boy?"

"We might as well begin. He's late eight times out of ten," grumbled Dad.

"Oh, he's *always* late," chuckled Mother. "What can you expect of a kid that age?"

They were eating their dessert when Bart finally came home. He burst open the front door and tore into the

dining room as if he could hardly wait, not only for dinner but also to see his family.

"Hi, Mother! Hi, Dad! Hello there, Dory!"

That was the way Bart always was, but his warm greetings didn't seem to bring him any nearer. Personally, Dorinda thought it was an act, put on to call attention to himself.

"Is it absolutely necessary for you to be late to every meal, my young friend?" inquired Dad.

"And why do you have to call me that horrible name? Dory! Sounds like a fat, clumsy boat."

"Did you have a good time?" asked Mother, bringing Bart a heaped plate of warm food from the kitchen.

"Oh, swell! I'm sorry I'm late, Dad, but the gang hauled me over to Pryors' for a coke after the rally." He shoved a huge pat of butter into his baked potato, then deluged the whole with gravy. He grinned at Dorinda. "After all, Dory, I should think anything would be a relief after Do-rin-da!"

"Well, some nicknames are all right, but not that one." She couldn't help smiling back at him. Of course, he didn't understand how she felt about it. For somebody cute and popular, Dory might be all right; for somebody little and round. For her, it was downright embarrassing. It made her feel more skinny and carrot-topped and shy than ever and also destroyed the illusion she could sometimes build up in her own mind that she was really slender, auburn, and stately. The worst of it was that some of the other kids had picked it up and called her

Dory, too. When she got mad, they teased her by continuing to use the nickname for a while, then became tired and forgot all about her, as usual.

"What are you doing tonight, Bart?" Mother asked briskly. Dorinda suspended her fork. It would be fun to go to a show, the one at the Palace maybe —

"Oh, I've got to play for a party up on the hill," answered Bart casually.

Dorinda's disappointment was followed by quick curiosity. Bart played the saxophone in an orchestra the high school boys had organized that was much in demand for programs and parties around town. He usually launched into a lively discussion of such an event. Tonight he did not seem at all anxious to talk about it.

Dad's usually inattentive ear apparently caught the same discrepancy. "At a party up on the hill? Whose party?"

"Some people named Korte," said Bart lightly.

"Korte," said Dad. "Is that Edward Korte? He's a lawyer downtown. I know him well."

"That may have been his first name," answered Bart slowly, with his head on one side as if he were trying hard to remember. "It was Ken who made the arrangements."

Korte. Dorinda gazed at Bart steadily, wondering why he was so unwilling to help Dad identify that name.

"Oh, dear," Mother said. "I thought it would be so nice if you and Dorinda could see that good picture at the Palace."

"Sorry, no can do," said Bart amiably.

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Mother frowned, as if she were figuring up a sum that didn't quite come out even. "You do have council meeting tonight, don't you, Tom?"

Dad's eye and mind had strayed to the newspaper. "What? Council? Yes, of course."

"And I have to give a report at the Tuberculosis Society meeting." Mother was still considering Dorinda, who stared back suspiciously. She saw that *she* was the part that didn't come out even. "Oh, say, Dorinda, I believe this is the evening the young folks have their party down at the church. A card came, inviting you. Did I give it to you? It might be fun to go, don't you think so?"

"No, indeed, I do not think so!" replied Dorinda fiercely. She knew those kids down at the church — Sugar 'n Spice and all her gang; they made her feel especially scrawny and shy. Besides, Mother was just trying to get rid of her.

"Well, I can ask Mrs. Sturtz to come over," Mother suggested.

"Mrs. Sturtz! Good heavens, Mother, you don't mean as a *sitter*?"

They all laughed at Dorinda's explosion.

"Well, not exactly, but I don't quite like to leave you all alone with this wave of lawlessness that's been going on in the city," her mother said apologetically. "We've been discussing it at the board meeting of the Child and Family Society and it's really frightful. No, Honey, not a sitter — just somebody for company, sort of."

"Well, I won't have a sitter," said Dorinda. They were still chuckling. They didn't have any idea how she felt as she stared grimly at her plate. She felt — she felt like a wild animal in a trap. Somehow — somehow in the midst of her comfortable, happy, well-cared-for life she was all alone, with no place to go. She couldn't even stay at home!

"All right, I'll go down to the church then, if I have to," she said sullenly, and she knew that they all exchanged glances past her bent head, rueful, indulgent, disappointed glances that meant: "Pouting again! Good gracious, what shall we do with this child — this ugly duckling?"

She was so different from the rest of them — from Dad, scholarly, keen, respected as a lawyer and officeholder in the city; from Mother, gay and competent, in demand on every board and in every organization; from Bart, football and basketball star and solo performer with the school band. Even her name was queer!

"Why did you have to give me that awful name!" she burst out suddenly, against her will.

They stared at her in consternation.

"It's your grandmother's name," said Dad, a little stiffly.

"Why, Dorinda is a quaint, sweet, delightful old name," said Mother.

"Why does a name matter so much, anyway?" said Bart. "A name is only what you make it."

"It matters to me," said Dorinda. "And it isn't quaint

and sweet and delightful to me. And I'm not my grandmother either, though I might as well be." She kicked back her chair and went out.

The parish house was brightly lighted when Mr. Poole drove up in front of it an hour later. Shadows danced on the windows. Dorinda felt as if it were some great arena, and she a Christian about to face the lions, recalling the dramatic-scenes she had read in *Ben Hur*.

"Have a good time, my dear," said her father, reaching past her to open the door. "I used to enjoy these shindigs myself. Met your mother at a church social, as a matter of fact. I'll be through at council meeting by ten, and that'll be plenty of time to stop back for you." With that he drove away.

Dorinda felt completely deserted. There were the steps before her and the great heavy door. Going into the recreation room, she knew she was just what she didn't want to be — homely and frightened and sour.

At first no one paid the slightest attention to her, which was less dangerous than the lions although rather more humiliating. But it was no wonder. Her arrival was lost in the noise coming from one end of the huge room, which doubled as gym and social hall. Fifteen or twenty boys and girls were swarming around the piano. Sugar 'n Spice was playing a tune with one finger, and her brother, Johnny Grieve, was sitting on top of the piano, with his head awry and his eyes turned up, singing a blues song in falsetto.

"Lunatics!" thought Dorinda, growing grimmer than

ever. Yet a wry smile twisted her mouth in spite of her — Mary Ann wore the prim, complacent expression of a good little girl at a recital, while Johnny screeched madly.

"Well, hello there, stranger!"

Dorinda turned to find Mr. Scott greeting her.

Mr. Scott was the assistant minister, and he hadn't been at First Church very long. He was a thin, active young man, not at all like the ponderous Dr. Harpeman, who had known Dorinda slightly ever since she was small and always smiled at her comfortably and vaguely, like an uncle. Mr. Scott had eyed her keenly on those rare occasions when they had met, as if trying to find out more about her. He made her nervous.

"I'm glad you came," said Mr. Scott. "We've been hoping you would. Come and join the others. Susan!" He detached from the group around the piano a girl who looked like an overgrown cherub. "This is Dorinda Poole. See that she gets introduced around, will you?"

"Sure thing!" Susan slipped her arm through Dorinda's, which immediately became stiff. "This is George — Dorinda. You did say *Dorinda*? And Katy." Dorinda nodded coolly to the fluffy blonde of the stadium encounter. "Here's Danny Somebody — I can't remember his last name." A sleepy-looking boy eyed Dorinda uninterestedly, without taking the trouble to supply the missing name. "And, oh, you must know Mary Ann and Johnny!"

"Oh, yes!" cried Mary Ann, swinging around on the

stool. "We've known each other for ages. I'm awfully glad you came, Dorinda."

"Johnny," said Mr. Scott, "don't you think it's time to start?"

Without waiting for any comments, he led them off rapidly to his study, a comfortable, much-used looking place with bookcases and easy chairs.

"Hey, fellows and girls," said Johnny plaintively, trying to be heard above the chatter. "Be serious!"

"What for?" yawned Danny Somebody. "This is a party, or did you misrepresent?"

"It will be a party," corrected Johnny. "But we have weighty matters to settle first." He frowned at them over imaginary spectacles. "The High School Fellowship wishes to welcome several new members who have finally succeeded in becoming freshmen. They are very green, of course, and almost useless — nevertheless, we welcome them. Will all frosh kindly stand up?"

Mary Ann and Katy and Susan stood up; Danny stood up; finally Dorinda stood up, feeling very cross about it. The others clapped and hooted a little.

"Well, anyway, we're glad to have you," said Johnny. "Now we'll have old business, and as there is no old business, we'll have new business. Mr. Scott has something to present."

"I have somebody to present," corrected Mr. Scott. "Terry Forrest. She'll tell you about some rather exciting possibilities the church has been considering."

A girl — grown-up, but still very young looking —

with blue eyes under striking black brows, came up to the desk. She had evidently slipped in quietly under cover of the freshmen's noisy welcome.

"Isn't she darling?" whispered Susan. "She and Hal, that's her husband, came last year from Chicago. He's grand, too."

"Mr. President and members of the High School Fellowship," Terry began in a reedy and flexible voice, "I'm a messenger to you from the committee appointed to organize the new church. Have you heard about it? I imagine you all know that First Church decided at the last business meeting to undertake the founding and support of a new church."

"A new church! Haven't we got a church?" inquired Danny, apparently much puzzled.

"For ourselves, yes," said Terry with amiable scorn. "This will be for people who haven't any church. It's to be out in the North End, near the Lowestoft Housing Unit, by the railroad tracks and the river. There aren't any churches anywhere out there — not for blocks and blocks. Isn't that right, Mr. Scott?"

"A couple of square miles in that area are unserved by any church at all," agreed Mr. Scott. "And the people need a church, particularly those in Swampy Point."

"Swampy Point! Pew!" said Susan. Everyone laughed. All of them had heard of Swampy Point. "Well, what have we got to do with that?"

"Just hear me out, and you'll know," said Terry. "We have a temporary meeting place: Washington School is

going to let our church use their auditorium for the worship services. But that's just the beginning. We need lots of people to help in all sorts of different ways. For instance, the people on the church board will be in charge of buying supplies and so on, the women's groups will help with entertainments and dinners, the Board of Education will get Sunday school teachers, and the College and Business Club offered to clean up after services. Now what we'd like you people to do — it's one of the nicest jobs — is to fix up the auditorium beforehand — arrange chairs and all that."

"In other words, we're elected as janitors," said Johnny in a hollow voice.

"Why, I think it's an honor!" Mary Ann declared. "Don't you, kids?"

"We want you to help in the choir, too," Terry continued. "First choir practice is tomorrow morning. You can arrange the auditorium then, too, and bring lunches and have fun and be through by afternoon."

"Well, how about it, gang?" asked Johnny. "Do we or don't we?"

"Sure, why not?" boomed Susan.

"Another thing," said Mr. Scott. "This group should take some part in the services, too. Maybe read the Scripture occasionally, and things like that."

"Danny can read Scripture when it's our turn," suggested Mary Ann. Dorinda expected the drowsy Danny to refuse, but he didn't.

"Fine," said Terry, making a memorandum in her

notebook. "Now, let's see. Have we got it all? I'll be leading — or attempting to lead — the choir. But oh, there is one thing. Mr. Scott, I've just discovered that Jennifer can't play for us after all. Her mother's ill, and she'll have to go home week ends. We're stuck for a pianist. Could somebody here do it, by any chance?"

"Dorinda Poole can play the piano," said Mary Ann.

Dorinda jumped, and the color flooded up embarrassingly under her freckles. She had been completely absorbed in the discussion, and it was frightful to be reminded of her own presence so suddenly and so publicly.

"Why, I — I don't think I could play for church," she said awkwardly.

"Of course, you could," Mary Ann assured her. "I've heard you accompany Bart when he played solos lots of times. You really know how to play. Hymns would be easy for you, wouldn't they?"

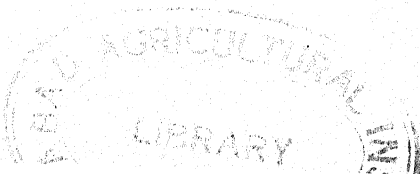
"Why, yes —" Dorinda admitted faintly.

"Do agree to play for us next Sunday, Dorinda," urged Terry, smiling warmly at her.

"Well . . ." said Dorinda. She couldn't seem to say no to Terry. Not only did Terry look just a bit like the actress Elizabeth Taylor; she seemed awfully nice, too.

"Now, that's settled," said Johnny. "By the way, Dorinda, why don't you bring Bart with you? We could use that big brute. Well, is that all, Terry?"

"Mission accomplished," said Terry, closing her notebook.



"Won't you stay for our party?" suggested Mr. Scott.

"Sorry; Hal's picking me up in a minute," said Terry. "Good night, everybody! See you tomorrow."

The meeting was over; the party was on. Susan took Dorinda by her arm and hauled her into the middle of things. There was one game after another and no time to worry about anything, and then came cider and doughnuts. Dorinda was actually surprised when her father stuck his red head in the door.

"Remember about tomorrow," Mary Ann called after her as she left. "Be at the church at nine-thirty."

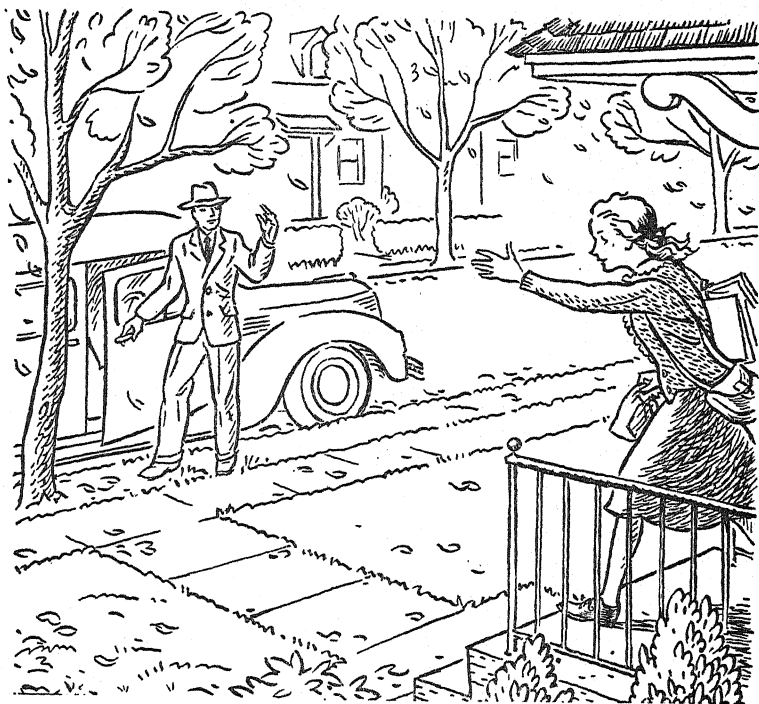
"So you had a good time after all?" asked Dad as he held open the car door.

"Yes," Dorinda assented, as she was in the habit of assenting whenever her parents asked her that question.

She didn't really know whether she had or not. And about this playing for services she was very dubious indeed!

The kids weren't so bad as she had thought. "Sugar 'n Spice," though not intended as a compliment, had been a surprisingly good description of Mary Ann, after all. Johnny was apparently capable of some things besides falsetto solos, and even Susan's noisy friendliness had been rather fun — for one evening.

But, of course, Dorinda could never fit in. If they wanted her at all, it was only because she was Bart Poole's sister.



CHAPTER TWO

At seven the next morning the round ivory clock on Dorinda's dresser suddenly began its insistent buzzing. Dorinda went through the usual stages of astonishment, alarm, and incredulity, digging her curly red head into the pillow and relaxing wonderfully, clear to her toes, as she realized it was time to get up. Limp as a puppy in the sunshine, she pictured with painstaking clearness all the things she must do immediately: jump out of bed, dash into the bathroom ahead of Bart, take her

shower, brush her teeth, comb her hair, dress, and rush down to breakfast. Yes, and she still had some algebra to finish —

Oh! It was Saturday. She didn't have to do anything — not even get up if she didn't want to!

All at once the fun went out of lying in bed, like the stretch out of a rubber band. Dorinda sat up and dangled her feet over the edge of the bed. She had practicing to do, of course, and homework, and there were a few radio programs she wanted to hear. But it promised to be a dull day.

Then she remembered the party last night and the work she had promised to help with this morning. Golly! She would have to hurry, after all.

"Hey, Bart, wait!" she cried as she heard him padding barefoot toward the bathroom.

She got there in time to see him wave mockingly and shut the bathroom door.

"Let me bathe first, please," she wheedled. "I have to get down to the church early."

"Sorry, Dory, I've got things to do, too," called Bart, and in a moment his shower was hissing at her.

By the time she got downstairs Bart was finishing his cereal, his face bright from scrubbing and his dark hair combed back wet and smooth. Mother and Dad had reached their second cups of coffee and the newspaper.

"Did you say you were going to church *today*?" Bart asked, ladling jam on his toast. "This is Saturday, you know."

"I know," said Dorinda, and shut her mouth provokingly. It was fun to make Bart curious.

"Then why so pious?" Bart insisted. Mother's newspaper dropped, too, as she waited for Dorinda's answer.

"The kids — the High School Fellowship — are helping out with that new church First Church is getting started. The high school bunch have to fix up the place for Sunday. Johnny Grieve told me to ask you to come, too, Bart."

"Sorry, I haven't got time," said Bart. He looked at her curiously. "I thought you didn't think much of that bunch of kids, Dory."

"Well, I didn't," Dorinda admitted. She remembered the group of girls who used to rush out of Sunday school together arm in arm and sit in a row in the balcony during church. The way they giggled together had always given Dorinda, existing in undesirable state between her parents, the impression that they were laughing at her. But had they been, really? She didn't believe now that Mary Ann would. "Oh, well, I don't know. Maybe they're not so hot. But Terry Forrest is nice, and she asked me to play the piano. And this sounds like sort of fun — fixing up the place and all."

"What place? What are you talking about?" asked Mother.

"The school where they're going to hold services at first, till they can get a regular building, you know."

"For goodness' sakes!" cried Mother. She raised her voice in assault upon the other newspaper. "Tom, listen!

THE THIRD WISH

We've been missing something. Remember last summer when Dr. Harpeman was telling us about some church extension project First Church was considering?"

Dad's face appeared for the first time, his keen features smoothed over by an expression of caution, as always when he was about to offer an opinion.

"Yes. Yes, I remember. I explained to Harpeman then that it was not the time for expansion, with economic affairs in such an uncertain state. Surely they haven't committed themselves to such a thing without the advice and consent of the congregation?"

"I suppose they discussed it, Tom, at that last quarterly business meeting," Mother said excitedly. "The one we missed because of the Rotary banquet. Yes, now it seems to me there was a notice that it was to be considered, but I was so busy just then it got snowed under. Where on earth is this new church to be, Dorinda? In a school building, you say?"

"At Washington School," said Dorinda. "I guess that's near the Lowestoft Housing Project."

"I should say it is," said Mother. "Near Swampy Point, too. We took a survey of that area just last year. Worst percentage of delinquency in the city."

"It's a good place for a church to move in, then, isn't it?" asked Dorinda.

"What can one little mission do?" Mother cried. "What we need there — what the city commission is considering — is a full-fledged settlement house, with clubs, clinic, and professional workers. What can one

little church, with untrained volunteer workers, do in a place like that?"

"You aren't going to get a settlement house there this year," said Dad. "City Council is committed to a program of economy."

"A mission, did you say, Dory?" Bart asked. "One of those soup kitchens?"

"It isn't like that at all!" Dorinda cried indignantly. "I think it could do some good, too. Even if it isn't a great big important setup like you want, Mother."

"Sociology warns us off," said Dad. "Young dreams lead us on. Remember when we wanted to go to Africa as missionaries, Dorothy?" He smiled over at Mother.

Mother smiled back, and a thoughtful expression settled on her frank and rosy face. Her bright dark eyes narrowed.

"That's right," she said. "And it surely can do some good, Dorinda. I think it's splendid you're taking an interest in it. Don't let anybody discourage you."

Dorinda's heart sank. She knew exactly what was going through Mother's mind. "Well, after all," Mother was thinking, "if Dorinda's interested in this harebrained scheme, more power to it. It may not amount to much, but anything to socialize the dear child."

After breakfast, Dorinda went to get her new library book and arranged herself with it in her favorite double-jointed position in the big blue chair in the corner of the living room. Mother, coming breathlessly downstairs on her way to a meeting, stopped short at sight of her.

"I thought you had to be down at the church by ninety-three," she said.

"I'm not going," said Dorinda, without removing her eyes from the book.

"You're not?" lamented Mother. "Why, I thought you sounded so much interested. I made sandwiches for you and everything. And besides, didn't you say they'd asked you to play for the choir? Won't they be counting on you?"

"Well, you said yourself it wasn't worth while. Somebody else can play for them."

"I suppose there's usually somebody who can play hymns," said Mother distractedly. "But shouldn't you at least call up and let them know? Oh, I must run. Tell me, Dorinda, do my stockings look all right?"

Dorinda glanced at Mother's stockings and grinned in spite of herself.

"They don't match, for sure," she said. "But I guess nobody'll notice it if you don't mention it."

"I probably will. I have no dignity," Mother sighed, "nor any time to shop. Well, I suppose you can eat your sandwiches at home. And that movie is still on at the Palace. Why don't you call up Cousin Claire and go to see it this afternoon? If you do, you might pick up a couple of pairs of nylons for me, size nine. And be sure to get home for an early dinner, so we can get to the game on time."

The house was very quiet after Mother had gone. The stillness seemed to rise up around Dorinda and distract

her from her book, one of the light, exciting mystery tales she read alternately with more classic stories like *Treasure Island*.

She really should go; she had told Terry she would play. But, as Mother said, there was usually somebody who could manage to play hymns though often very badly! Mother didn't think it was important that she go, only wholesome, like cod-liver oil. No, thank you!

But she couldn't keep her mind off what the others might be doing — Johnny tearing around acting ridiculous, and Mary Ann and the others laboring earnestly, but not too hard to have fun. And Terry would be there, trying to lead the choir while some lame-brain like Susan mangled the accompaniment —

The phone rang. It made her jump.

"Dorinda?" said the phone, making Dorinda's heart give a little lurch of guilty alarm. It was Terry's nice, different voice. "What's the matter? Can't you come?"

"Well, I have lots of practicing and homework to do," Dorinda countered lamely, glancing guiltily at the library book.

"Oh, it won't take long! Mr. Scott said he'd drive right up for you, and you can get home soon after lunch. We need to rehearse the choir, you know."

Terry didn't sound mad, but she sounded firm. "All right," said Dorinda meekly.

Another voice broke in rudely. "Hey, why don't you get Bart to bring you down?"

Terry's voice cut him off smoothly. "That's Johnny, as

no doubt you can tell. Could your brother bring you?"

"He isn't here. He's busy this morning," said Dorinda. Though at what, I don't know, she thought. They *really* want Bart, not me.

"Oh, well. Mr. Scott'll be right there. Be seeing you." The phone clicked.

She'd have to hurry; she was still in her pajamas! Humming distractedly, Dorinda rushed to get dressed. She remembered Terry's crisp voice and stopped humming. Would Terry ever forgive her? She gathered up music, tossed her lunch into a bag, and was ready just in time to dash out of the door when Mr. Scott's horn summoned her.

"I'm sorry you had to make an extra trip," she said diffidently, as he opened the door for her.

"Never mind. I'd forgotten the hymnbooks anyway," said Mr. Scott. "Besides, I've found a new short cut!"

Dorinda looked puzzled.

"A short cut to the new church," explained Mr. Scott, turning into a very narrow alley with an air of triumph. "Short cuts are very important to me, because I generally have about three and three-quarter minutes to get somewhere at the opposite end of town, and naturally a minister mustn't exceed the speed limits — at least, not much."

"I should think not," said Dorinda, then glanced at him abashed, at which he laughed.

"The New Church. The New Church. How is that for a name?" asked Mr. Scott.

"All right," said Dorinda politely, though she thought it was very dull. But she felt it was much safer not to commit herself, especially to a grown person, and particularly to a preacher.

"It hasn't much oomph," complained Mr. Scott. "Trouble is, most of the beautiful names we might use — Church of the Good Shepherd, Church of the Open Door, and so on — have been taken over by other churches, so we can't use them without being confusing."

"That's right; I never thought of that," said Dorinda. "It doesn't seem quite fair." She pondered for a moment. "Would that be true of a name like — like Friendship Church?" she asked shyly.

"Friendship Church — I don't think so," said Mr. Scott, giving her a look of surprise and approval. "Friendship Church — I really like that. We might present it to the church as a possibility. I don't know of any name that could better express our purpose."

"Why, we're here already!" gasped Dorinda.

They had been whistling around corners and shooting down alleys Dorinda had never seen before. Now the Lowestoft Housing Project loomed ahead, extending for monotonous blocks in every direction. Ponderous red brick oblongs, set in unvarying parallel, they had the inhuman look of factories or offices, and the only signs that they were dwellings were the dismal clutter of scattered papers on the dusty lawns, the grimy children playing around, and the flapping rows of washing that decorated nearly every narrow yard.

On the other side of the housing project was a block of ugly little stores with a beautiful, vast new supermarket at one end and a gloomy two-story tavern at the other. Just as the supermarket seemed to beam with a bland and characterless smile, the tavern seemed to lower with its drawn blinds and the bright neon sign above its close-shut door announcing "Club 98."

Just across the street was the school, with one newer building attached to a very old one, surrounded by a macadam playground with swings and slides.

"Do you want to carry some of these?" asked Mr. Scott, and handed her an armful of hymnals, loading his own arms high.

He opened the school door for her and then streaked ahead down the hall. "Right this way," he called. "Follow me," he added, turning a corner half a block away.

The auditorium apparently was used also for a gym, and strangely, it was entered through a small kitchen and up a flight of steps.

"There's a better entrance at the other end," said Mr. Scott, greeting Dorinda at the top as she panted up the steps with her hymnbooks, "but it takes too long. Come on. The choir's ready."

"Well, well, the late Miss Poole," Danny announced when she came in. Dorinda didn't know quite how to take it, but Mary Ann said quickly, "Doesn't the auditorium look nice, Dorinda?"

Dorinda, looking around, nodded vaguely. As a gym it was all right, with a good floor and basketball equip-

ment and mats hung on the walls. Even as an auditorium it was not too bad, with bleachers on one side and a stage on the other. But as a church! She could see that they had made an effort to give the stage a little atmosphere, with a pulpit, a plant, and rows of chairs for the choir. But it all seemed very depressing to Dorinda.

"Let's go through the service now, just as it will be tomorrow," suggested Mr. Scott, springing up on the stage. "Piano, Dorinda. Play a couple of bars of something subdued, appropriate for the prelude. Places, choir."

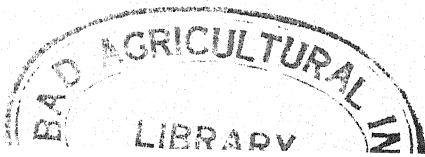
The boys followed Mr. Scott, leaping onto the stage; the girls went up the steps, all except Mary Ann, who unfolded a single chair in the middle of the vast emptiness and sat there to provide audience reaction.

Dorinda opened a hymnbook and played a few bars, then stopped at Mr. Scott's signal. He led them through a rapid synopsis of the service, giving Danny a chance to rehearse his Scripture reading. Dorinda listened with surprise. Susan called him Danny Somebody, but Dorinda had thought of him as Danny Nobody. His reading proved her wrong. He read the passage with expression and meaning.

"Now you can give them a workout, Terry," said Mr. Scott.

"All right," said Terry in her voice like that of a young boy. "Dorinda, let's try a few of the simplest hymns possible this first time. What do you suggest?" Her smile warmed Dorinda. Terry was not angry with her.

"I like 'Fairest Lord Jesus'," suggested Dorinda.



Then she had to concentrate hard, for she had never played for a chorus before, and it proved to be quite different from accompanying your brother, with whom you'd played since you were eight. But it was very interesting.

"It really sounded pretty nice!" Mary Ann told them earnestly from her lonely vantage point when three-quarters of an hour of hard work was over. "That is, it will, when you don't stop and start so often! Come on, let's eat now!"

After lunch Mr. Scott suddenly exclaimed, "Wouldn't you know, I'm half an hour late for an appointment! Pile in. I'll give you a ride up to the church if you'll hurry. You can all get home from there, can't you?"

"Oh, sure. Then we'll have plenty of time to do all our homework before dinner and the game!" Mary Ann clasped her hands earnestly. "Oh, I hope we win. Susan and Danny, we'll meet you at the first gate. Dorinda, where do you sit?"

"I'm going with Mother and Dad," said Dorinda. "They have box seats."

"Oh! Well, maybe we'll see you! Here's hoping!"

They did see each other in the after-game crowd, and Mary Ann waved and shook hands with herself most enthusiastically in greeting and congratulation, as if Dorinda, being Bart's sister, were somehow responsible for the winning touchdown Bart had made.

"But they could have asked me to sit with them. Oh, well," thought Dorinda as she went to bed.

The next morning Dorinda was ready at ten-thirty, wearing her new toast-colored sweater and green suit. She stacked her music nervously. Dr. Harpeman had called up at dinnertime the night before and explained to her parents about Dorinda's part in the morning service.

"I know you'll get along splendidly," said Mother, hurrying past with a newly pressed dress over her arm. "I wish I could hear you, but I had already agreed to sit on the platform over at Calvary and introduce Dr. Howard Hyler, the literacy man. Dr. Harpeman said it might make you nervous, anyway. Oh! There's a car stopping in front. It must be Mrs. Jordan after you. Good luck, Honey."

"Give 'em a good show, Dory," said Bart, looking up from the living room floor where he was sprawled over the sports section of the Sunday paper, enjoying in the ease of bathrobe and slippers the accounts of his exploits of the night before.

"I will," Dorinda thought, switching her skirts with unusual jauntiness as she went down the front walk toward the car. She had sorted out a lot of easy things, hymns and old pieces she could play like a breeze.

"Well, Dorinda, how nice you look!" said Mrs. Jordan, a big, handsome woman with high color and a resonant voice. "That red hair looks gorgeous, now you're learning how to take care of it. I haven't seen much of you for so long — my, how long has it been since you were in my Sunday school class?"

"Six years," said Dorinda, with a touch of her father's dry, accurate manner, which always suggested there was much more he could say if he only would. What Dorinda wouldn't say in this case was that she had never cared to go to Sunday school at all after having Mrs. Jordan for a teacher.

The streets were bright with crisp fall sunshine that blazed on the colored trees but laid no weight of heat upon the spirits. Lots of people were moving toward church with composed liveliness. Dorinda and Mrs. Jordan passed the busy corners where the downtown churches were concentrated, their own among them. Mrs. Jordan leaned out.

"There are the Hyatts, I do believe," she remarked. "I haven't seen them at church in ages. They were so upset when Dr. Harpeman came, you know."

"Oh?" said Dorinda. When Mother, infrequently, went to an afternoon church meeting, she remembered that Bart always referred to it as the "gossip circle."

Mrs. Jordan drove on downtown through the deserted shopping district and into the old business section, decayed and dirty, near the river. No throngs of comfortable people here hurrying to church in their white gloves, though the upper stories of many of the shops and taverns showed the limp curtains and window-sill plants of makeshift dwellings. A few men idled against the storefronts, and some dirty children played on the sidewalks. Nobody seemed to be going anywhere in particular. Some were white people, others Negroes.

"Poor souls," said Mrs. Jordan with a compassionate tone.

Dorinda suddenly remembered one Sunday morning long ago when the girls had begun teasing her about her red hair and Mrs. Jordan had given her the coveted position of holding the glass globe while the birthday children dropped in their pennies.

They were riding out of the business section now into a region of poor little homes, smoke-blackened or with unpainted boards weathered to iron-gray. Then the housing project loomed upon them, massive and monotonous.

"Here we are!" said Mrs. Jordan. "See, there are some people going in now."

There were three of them. The woman and the boy were together, but one couldn't for a moment imagine that the girl was with them; her manner was so forbidding. Dorinda leaned forward, excited. Until this moment the new church had been only the mistiest idea in her mind, with the group of noisy young people from First Church dominating the foreground. Now it suddenly became actual as she looked at the three people, and from that moment on they, in a way, were the church to her.

The woman was clean and rosy and blonde, and her son, who was about sixteen, looked like her. She held open the door for the girl and spoke to her with a friendly expression.

The girl went in, but she didn't even glance at the

other two. She looked past them over her shoulder at Dorinda.

"She must be just about my age," thought Dorinda with a feeling of shock. Nobody with an eye for color and style had helped choose that girl's dress nor pressed it for her that morning nor checked on her grooming with a pleasant, authoritative air. Nobody had made her brush her hair a hundred strokes every night; it was shaggy and rough, shoved behind her ears in an untidy black cloud. It was hard to imagine anyone telling this proud, defiant-looking creature she must go to church, and she looked half unwilling herself. Why *had* she come?

"I'd better lock everything up," said Mrs. Jordan briskly. "Down here they'd just as lief steal the seats right out of the car."

Dorinda and Mrs. Jordan followed the others into the school and up the steps. Children who had been at Sunday school were making little sorties in and out the auditorium door.

"My land, what an entrance!" said Mrs. Jordan soundingly as they went through the little kitchen.

Dorinda knew what she meant, though regretting her frank expression. The auditorium looked so large and barnlike, the huddle of chairs in the center so tiny and pathetic. A few people were sitting there, children were skidding across the polished floor, and Mary Ann, Johnny, and some of the others were conferring with one another or herding children with an air of nervous importance.

"Dorinda! Good!" said Mr. Scott, handing her a typewritten sheet. "Here's the order of service. Let's assemble the choir in the — er — vestry and get started."

Dorinda went with the others up the steps to the wings where a few dusty flats of scenery and stacks of chairs leaned in the dimness. Mr. Scott gave Dorinda a nod, and she went out alone on the platform.

She sat down at the piano, braced her trembling knees, and opened her music. She felt panicky although she knew so well the familiar pieces and the hymns. It was a feeling that had started when she first saw the girl at the door, tense and high-strung, like a lost, wild thing, and that had grown as she tried to see the little church from that girl's point of view.

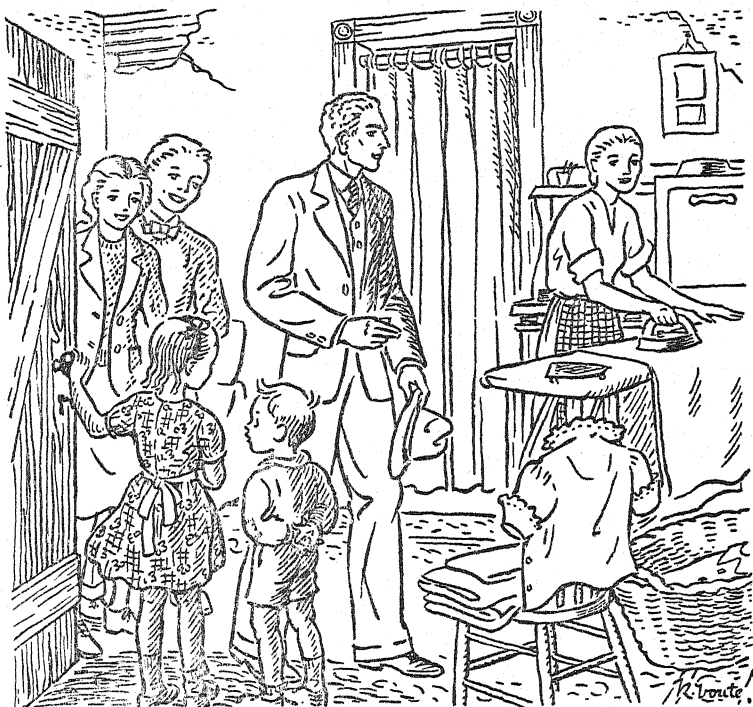
Dorinda stared blankly at her piece of music. Dvorak's "Largo" — easy and pleasant. It had seemed just the thing for a prelude when she thought it over ahead of time. But now Dorinda felt a terrible desire to play something really thrilling, so that somehow, by her music, this barnlike, makeshift room would become a place of worship.

But everyone was waiting. She must start. And she had nothing but this arrangement of "Largo" to play. So she played it the best she could, while in her mind was thundering a Bach chorale she had once heard. She thought it was called "Eternity, O Mighty Word." She must learn to play selections like that.

When the service was over Mary Ann came hurrying around to meet her. "Dorinda, that was grand!" she said.

"I knew you could do it." And Susan roared, "Put her there, pal!"

Dorinda smiled a little vaguely. She was looking for the girl at the door. What had the service meant to her? But the girl had disappeared.



CHAPTER THREE

Rosy and beaming, Mrs. Poole sat at the head of the breakfast table the following Saturday morning and gave out warm, spicy cinnamon rolls and plans for the week end.

"Of course, the game is tonight," she said. "We must fit our plans around that. There's a symphony concert tonight, too, with Gary Elmore as soloist, but—" she snapped her fingers and wrinkled her nose at Bart—"we have a date to see a real virtuoso."

"Well, I don't know, dear," said Dad. "I have some very important briefs to go over."

"Oh —! Oh, well, it can't be helped." Mrs. Poole conquered her disappointment. "Dorinda and I will go, anyway. Aunt Lil wants you to come for lunch, Dorinda, and that suits me because I have the Child and Family Luncheon this noon."

"I'm going to be busy this morning," said Dorinda. "I'm going to a class at the church."

"What sort of class, dear?" asked her mother approvingly.

"Oh, just a class." Why on earth did Mother's encouraging interest dry up all Dorinda's desire to talk about it? "It's a training class. Then this afternoon we're going out to call on the people around Washington School. We're all divided into teams. I'm going with Mr. Scott and Johnny Grieve to call on some families down at Swampy Point."

"Swampy Point seems an odd place for a young girl to go calling," Dad objected.

"But, of course, with Mr. Scott it's all right," Mother amended, with the warning glance at Dad that Dorinda dreaded. "But never go down there without a man, dear. Now, back to our plans. I thought it might be fun to have dinner at High Point Lodge before the game."

She surveyed them happily. High Point Lodge was an inn high above the river, where you could get a good view and tasty food. Going there had always ranked high in the Poole roster of treats.

Bart snapped his fingers with apparent annoyance. "Oh, Mother, I'm sorry. I meant to tell you before. A gang of us are going up to Ken Little's tonight."

"I'm afraid I can't make it either, Dorothy," said Dad. "I'll have to pick up a bite downtown and get right back to the office."

"Oh," said Mother again. "Oh, well!" she repeated, turning her voice up at the end cheerfully. "Dorinda and I will just have a pair of mighty good steaks at home, then, won't we, Honey?"

"That will be lovely," said Dorinda with emphasis. She did think Dad and Bart might make a little more effort to fit in with Mother's plans.

Dorinda found that afternoon that she herself felt a little odd about calling in such a place as Swampy Point, even with a minister.

"This is the long way around, isn't it?" Dorinda asked as she set out with Mr. Scott and Johnny after training class and lunch were over. She was remembering the zigzag short cut of last Saturday.

Mr. Scott chuckled. "I'm not pressed for time today," he explained. "Did you know there's a Buddhist temple up that street?"

"No kidding?" said Johnny, craning his neck. "That's Hop Alley, isn't it?"

"Oh? Is that what you call it?" asked Mr. Scott. "It is a street of Chinese homes. I had tea there just the other day with a Chinese family whose son was at the university with me."

"You did?" Dorinda cried in surprise. "Why — why I always thought —"

"It was a den of opium," finished Johnny. "Me, too. Mr. Scott, you're taking all the spice out of life."

"We may find some spice at Swampy Point," warned Mr. Scott. "Or — something quite different. Who knows?"

Bumpety-bump, they drove across four or five rows of railroad tracks. A block or so beyond was the river. The road was made of cinders. Next the car turned into a little one-block street of blackened shacks.

Dorinda had often looked down from the High Drive at the river, which slashed the placid hills and fields of the countryside with its bright blue curves. In sparkling weather, sailboats raced along it, and barges and small steamers were going up or down. The river was always traveling and gave a feeling of excitement and adventure to the inland city.

But down here, on a level with the water, the effect was different. There was a strong, sour, slimy smell, and the water was not blue but gray and dirty as it lapped against the rubbish of planks and weeds and bottles it had itself washed ashore. The surface of the river was wide and cold, cutting you off from the warm autumn hills on the other side.

"Kinda chilly," said Johnny, hunching his jacket higher around his neck.

"I'd better park back a ways," said Mr. Scott, "out of respect for my tires."

Dorinda and Johnny picked their way after him. "Out of respect for our shoes," Dorinda murmured, "you should have parked closer."

The first shack they came to was roughly organized of corrugated iron, rusted completely red. It had a door and one window, a chimney, perhaps two chimneys. Mr. Scott knocked, producing a shuddering vibration of the whole hut, and turned to wink reassurance to the young people behind him.

He knocked several times without producing a sign of response.

"Guess there's no one home," he said in a cheerfully resigned tone. Just then Dorinda glanced at the window and jumped. Johnny and Mr. Scott looked, too.

Somebody was watching them from the window — an old man with a beard. It was a magnificent, flowing, Old Testament beard. The face was more like Santa Claus, with round and ruddy features, but there was nothing benevolent about the expression.

"Hello, there," said Mr. Scott with business-like friendliness that ignored the oddness of the situation. "We've come about the new church."

"The church," said the old man in a loud, muffled voice. "The resort of the money-changers. Begone."

Mr. Scott paused a moment, then decisively turned away.

Dorinda's heart was pounding violently. "I want to go home!" she said involuntarily. Nothing like that had ever happened to her before.

"I don't blame you," said Johnny. "Jeepers!"

Mr. Scott didn't even pause.

"Oh, they won't all be like that," he replied briskly. "Say, he's an interesting-looking old fellow, isn't he? I'd like to have a talk with him. But it's not likely I'll have a chance. Come on, this one looks more promising."

It was like a sad little gray dollhouse. Part of an old iron bedframe, with colored rags tied all over it, stood against the front.

"There are children here," Dorinda murmured. She thought the bedstead was used in a game.

Sure enough, a little girl opened the door, a very thin little girl about eight with big dark eyes. Beyond her was a little brother of five or so, steadily sucking his thumb with his forefinger curled around his nose.

"Hello, there," said Mr. Scott in a soothing voice. "Is your mother home?"

"Apollonia!" called a thin, high voice. "Mind your manners! Ask the folks in!"

The little girl moved aside, stumbling over the very little brother behind her, and the three stepped in, feeling like giants in that tiny room.

"We've come to tell you about the new church," Mr. Scott explained. "I'm the preacher, and these are some of the young folks. What is your name?"

The woman, who was ironing, smiled. She set her cooling flatiron on the stove and fastened the wooden handle into the hot one. Her thin face was attractive and friendly.

"We're Carnarvons," she said. "These here are Apollonia and Howie. Excuse me going on with the ironing, folks, but I got to finish this basket today. Polly, Howie, move them things off the chair so the Miss can sit down. Sorry there ain't more room. Careful you don't muss them sheets, Polly."

Dorinda sat down on the edge of the chair and tried not to peer at things.

"I heard all about the church," said Mrs. Carnarvon, putting a beautiful sheen on the damask tablecloth that looked so out of place in the poor little room. "My second daughter went on Sunday. My oldest daughter's poorly. Oh, not her," she added as the guests looked inquiringly at Apollonia, wondering which daughter she could be. "The least ones ain't started yet. Portia!" she commanded.

Behind her, faded green portieres concealed another room. After a long, silent moment these parted, revealing a girl. Dorinda made an involuntary sound.

She was the girl at the church door. Portia! It was a perfect name for her, and she fitted perfectly into this family, too. The mother and even the two little children all had that fine-drawn, high-stepping air. Skinny, you might call them, haggard and nervous; but Dorinda felt for other words. The children, with their small, delicate bones and luminous eyes were like fairies — or would have been, if hair and skin had had more luster, instead of being dull and lifeless. The mother and Portia in just the same way barely missed being beautiful. And the

way Portia looked now at the three visitors, blue eyes stern and unfriendly under straight black brows, reminded Dorinda of another Portia (she had seen *The Merchant of Venice* recently) dispensing justice in the court to unworthy Shylock.

Mr. Scott was not intimidated. He looked right back at her. "I saw you at church," he said, "and looked around for you afterward, but I guess you skipped right out. Did you say you have another daughter who is ill, Mrs. Carnarvon?"

"She's poorly right now," corrected Mrs. Carnarvon. "She'd like fine to see you, if you'll kindly step into the next room."

The girl in the big iron bed, which practically filled the tiny bedroom, was sixteen or so. Long dark hair framed the thin face on the pillow; there were purple hollows under her eyes. But she smiled at them eagerly and held out her hand to shake first Mr. Scott's and then Dorinda's. Her nightgown looked as if it were made of sugar-sacking, but Dorinda noticed a spray of flowers embroidered on the front.

"This is Melissa," said Portia indifferently, gazing past them out the window.

"Just call me Missy," said the girl. "It's mighty kind of you-all to call!" Her voice was rough and hoarse.

"We'll come again, now we know you're here," said Mr. Scott matter-of-factly. "Melissa is a lovely name."

"But Missy seems more friendly!" She smiled back.

"Nicknames are friendly things," agreed Mr. Scott.

"Do you like to read? We have a magazine exchange down at First Church, and when the magazines are a few months old, I don't know what to do with them. Could I bring them to you?"

"I'd be proud if you would," said Melissa politely. She seemed to hesitate, plucking at the quilt, a dull old heavy one made of patches from men's suits.

"Is there something else you'd like?" asked Mr. Scott.

"Oh, no!" said Missy. "But — are there any of them magazines with embroidery patterns? I do love to embroider."

"I know there are," Dorinda broke in with a rush. She was afraid Mr. Scott would be too literal in this feminine matter, and the patterns she saw in her mind's eye were actually, at the moment, reposing in the lower righthand drawer of her mother's sewing machine.

When they went back into the other room, Johnny pointed to a ragged baseball glove, neatly hung on the wall, and said to Howie, "That isn't yours, is it?"

At this terrifying onslaught, Howie deserted the outpost of Apollonia and retreated to the fortress of his mother.

"That's Fred's," said Mrs. Carnarvon. "He's our big boy. He's fifteen. Year older than Portia."

"Why doesn't he come over to church, too?" suggested Johnny. "We're planning a ball team."

"He used to be mighty fond of playing ball," said Mrs. Carnarvon, straightening her shoulders, her iron pausing wearily for just a minute.

"Well, we'd be very glad to have him," said Mr. Scott. "We hope to get some ball games organized soon. And choir practice comes next Wednesday night. Do you sing, young lady?"

A flush colored Portia's face. "I do like to sing," she said.

"But I don't like to have her walking about alone at night," Mrs. Carnarvon demurred.

"We'll pick her up," promised Mr. Scott. "Seventhirty. And on Friday there's a party for everybody, old and young. We'll have cars down here for that, too, quarter of eight."

"Portia and the least ones could go," said Mrs. Carnarvon. "But I must stay with Missy."

"What is Missy's trouble?" asked Mr. Scott.

Mrs. Carnarvon started ironing very fast. "She's just poorly. She'll be well again, soon."

"Indeed, I hope so," said Mr. Scott. "Well, we must be going on. Are there other folks down here likely to be interested in the church?"

"I reckon Mis' Barnhardt would. They live two houses down. I don't hardly think the Browns — next door. There's only a father and two boys. Not but what they need the church! The Sedgewicks are nice folks. They're up at the end."

"I wonder why the city welfare department doesn't do something to help that girl?" Mr. Scott mused as they went on. He knocked repeatedly at the next door with no answer.

"Well, let's try the Barnhardts."

The Barnhardts were willing to come to the party and to church and to anything else that was going on. There were several tow-headed, blue-eyed Barnhardt children living in one airless little room. The Sedgewicks lived better and were friendly, too. At other houses Mr. Scott and the two young people were regarded with suspicion or indifference.

"Well, that's something. Three families with lots of possibilities," said Mr. Scott as they got back to the car and climbed in.

"I'm plumb tuckered out!" said Johnny. "What an afternoon! I'm glad we're going back to the school for nourishment."

Dorinda was glad, too. She felt as weary as if she'd been banged and hammered, and the drawn but smiling face of Missy kept dancing before her eyes. She had known some people were poor and ill but had never before seen and felt what poverty and illness really meant.

The Lowestoft Housing Project looked quite different to eyes that had just seen Swampy Point — it looked solid, comfortable, and safe. The little row of shops across from the school was very inviting, the supermarket magnificent — but the tavern still wore its sullen and secretive air. A group of boys were going in just as the car stopped before the school. Dorinda glanced distastefully at them, then stared.

They were quite young, certainly not more than high

school age, and one of them, from the back, certainly looked like Bart — same tan jacket and brown slacks.

But it couldn't be he! Bart was up the river at Ken Little's. Besides, why should he be going into a disreputable-looking place like Club 98?

She walked upstairs rather dazedly between Mr. Scott and Johnny — that is, Mr. Scott was ahead and Johnny was behind. Nearly all the teams were there already, spread over chairs and the floor in a fatigued condition and refreshing themselves with pop from the dispenser.

"What luck did you guys have?" asked Susan. "We snared half a dozen families from the housing project. Only barely got started, too. That Mrs. Olsen is the nicest thing. She gave us cookies."

"We did pretty well on Bellman Street," said Katy. "They'll all come to the party, at least. About church, they're not quite so sure."

It was all quite noisy and lighthearted. "Johnny and Dorinda haven't peeped since they got here," Susan bellowed suddenly. "Come on kids, give! How'd you make out?"

The loud remark seemed to touch Dorinda to the quick.

"You people don't seem to realize what this is all about!"

A silence followed her outburst, and Dorinda herself sat as if frozen. It was true, but she shouldn't have said it like that. She didn't want them to think she was sharp and sarcastic, and dislike her.

"Pass the pretzels, please," said Danny in a meek tone, and everyone laughed.

Mr. Scott had been sitting in the background with his forehead in his hand, lost in one of his occasional thinking fits. Everyone had forgotten him till he spoke.

"Remember, folks, we had different experiences this afternoon. Dorinda's was more sobering than most. It doesn't do any harm to regard our job seriously, but let's have fun, too, and not be cross at one another."

Like most adult admonitions this had the effect only of dampening everyone's spirits although only for the moment.

When it was time to go home and Dorinda started out defiantly alone, looking at nobody, Mary Ann caught up with her.

"Won't you sit with us at the game tonight?" she asked. "We could meet you at the gate."

"Oh, I'd love to!" said Dorinda. Then she paused. She was remembering how Dad and Bart had disappointed Mother about tonight. "Oh, dear, Mary Ann, I guess I can't. I promised to sit with my mother."

"Why sit on bleachers when you can sit in a box?" asked Katy saucily.

Dorinda looked at her coldly. Certainly she wouldn't explain to Katy that her mother really needed her.

When she went in her own front door, she sniffed a wonderful smell of steak.

"Hello there," called her mother. "Come and help me get dinner on, will you, Honey?"

"What a feast!" said Dorinda as she saw the wire basket full of golden-brown French fries and the bowl of fluffy whipped cream. "But why four steaks?"

"Oh, I called up Mrs. Caldwell and Miss Fry. They're going with us to the game, too. We'll have to get over there early to pick up an extra ticket."

Dorinda stood stock-still. "And I thought you were counting on me to sit with you — and I turned down the kids when they asked me —"

"Well, you shouldn't have done that," said Mother almost indignantly. "Don't you ever turn down a chance to have fun, just for poor old Ma! Why don't you call up and tell them you've changed your mind?"

"You know perfectly well a person can't do that, after she's turned somebody down," said Dorinda coldly.

The dinner was good, but Dorinda had nothing to say. She didn't care much for these friends of her mother; she thought Mother didn't either, really, but asked them only because they were lonely. Why couldn't Mother realize her own daughter was sometimes lonely?

But after the game, a victory for West End High, and fun in spite of everything, Mary Ann came clear across the stadium entrance to speak to her.

"Wasn't Bart wonderful?" she asked, smiling and squeezing Dorinda's hand. "Well, see you tomorrow!"

"Sugar 'n Spice
Is *really* nice."

Dorinda revised the mocking couplet gratefully. She

and Lib hadn't set the right value on Mary Ann. But just the same, Dorinda wanted the others to like her, too — to like her because she was Dorinda, not just out of kindheartedness. Maybe they never would. But perhaps after a week or so, when she'd had time to practice, they would at least respect her.

The next few days she practiced so much that even her busy family noticed something different.

"Come on to dinner, Dorinda; it's all getting cold," Mother called from the dining room, where the others were already eating.

Dorinda came, laughing a little self-consciously and rubbing tired fingers. "It's silly, but I forgot you called me," she explained.

"She's got to knock those Swampy Pointers off their seats," teased Bart. "Headlines in Monday's papers: 'Society Girl Takes Washington School Congregation by Storm.'"

"Speaking of Washington School," retorted Dorinda, "didn't I see you down in that neck of the woods the other day — Saturday afternoon, to be exact, going into Club 98?"

She had spoken on impulse, nettled by his teasing. She had expected a quick and amused denial. And the denial came, but only after a silence that her startled ears paced off into seconds: one, two, three — until many had passed.

"You're off the beam, Sister dear," said Bart lightly then.

And Mother remonstrated, "Don't you remember, Bart was out at Ken Little's that afternoon, Dorinda."

Father said nothing but looked intently from Bart to Dorinda. It was Dorinda who dropped her eyes, her face flooded with miserable scarlet. Bart looked back coolly, his mouth curved in a quiet, one-sided smile.

When Dorinda went back to her practicing, it was hard for her to concentrate. It was so horrible to have to wonder whether Bart was telling the truth — Bart, who had always been even uncomfortably honest, calmly confessing his worst crimes and then daring you to scold him. What did it all mean?

* * *

Sunday came again, and when she sat down on the squeaky piano bench, Dorinda's palms were clammy.

She played the Bach piece for the prelude. She played it as solemnly as she could, each note clear and beautiful. And when she had finished she felt breathless with success. For her, now, the room was a church. If only she had made the others feel it, too.

When the service was over she delayed, shuffling over her music. She was shy about receiving people's reaction.

"Hey!" Johnny hailed her. Apparently it wasn't a temple to him. "Why did you have to go all high-brow on us this morning? Gosh, I felt as if I were at a funeral."

"Oh, no, Johnny," Mary Ann amended tactfully. "It wasn't at all like a funeral. But — but it was a little —" she lowered her voice and looked around. "It was a little too slow, don't you think?"

Dorinda caught back her disappointment quickly, tightly, lest it show. "I'm sure I don't know," she said coldly and hurried out.

She had just given a really strong sniff when a voice stopped her. Looking aside she saw Portia standing on the steps.

"Oh, hello!" said Dorinda ungraciously, hastily wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. She was in no state to talk to anybody, let alone this proud, unresponsive creature.

But Portia took two or three steps toward her and put out her hand.

"Say, you can sure play!" she said earnestly. "That first piece, now — I liked it! It made me feel — well, kind of strong and brave."

Dorinda stared at her, the tears drying in her eyes. "Oh, Portia, I'm so glad you liked it." Portia had found even more in the music than Dorinda had hoped. What a thrilling sort of girl Portia was! "Could we walk together?" she said. "I'm going to the bus."

"We don't go the same way," said Portia, "but anyway, I'd like to walk a piece with you."



CHAPTER FOUR

Now that we're ready, will anybody come?" Dorinda asked, looking around the room, which was definitely a gym tonight, decorated with pumpkins and cornstalks, refreshment tables and plenty of space for games.

"This is the moment when you realize that you can't prepare a party beforehand — a party is the people," explained Terry, pausing in her flight from the kitchen to the miniature stage on which she and Hal were putting the finishing touches.

"And here they come," murmured Mary Ann, hastily rearranging a pumpkin at the foot of a cornstalk.

Several children appeared, tagging after a thin, little, grinning man.

"For heaven's sake, loosen up," muttered Hal, breezing past the momentarily paralyzed young folks to greet the newcomers. He shook hands with them as if he had always known them.

Dorinda's job was to play "background music," and she was very glad to have a vantage point from which she could see the party slowly shaping up. It would have been funny if she hadn't been so anxious for everything to go well. Like oil and water, the two elements refused to mix. The First Church young people kept rushing about, pretending to be very busy, casting shy looks at their guests and tossing one another snatches of talk; the guests lingered near the entrance as if ready to bolt out at any moment. Mr. Scott greeted all, with anxious looks over his shoulder at his delaying cohorts, and Terry and Hal firmly collared one after another of the young hosts and escorted them over to meet and mingle with the guests.

A little late, Portia appeared at the door. Apollonia and Howie hovered behind her while she stood surveying the scene with a high head.

Mrs. Jordan, flushed from working in the kitchen, burst out and captured Portia. She chattered confidently, while Portia eyed her over folded arms, and Apollonia and Howie stood frozen with bashfulness.

"Just one more piece," Johnny said to Dorinda.

When Dorinda surveyed the scene again she saw that Portia had escaped Mrs. Jordan only to fall into the gentle, relentless care of Dr. Harpeman. Dr. Harpeman could carry on a perfectly delightful monologue on any subject for many hours at a time without the slightest encouragement from his victim. The children had been carried off to the end of the room where the very small fry were being entertained with games of their own by Miss Rourke, the head nursery teacher from First Church. The little, grinning man (she thought he must be Mr. Sedgewick) was as good as Hal at friendly mixing.

"Play a commanding chord, Dorinda," murmured Terry, and disappeared behind the curtains.

Dorinda beat out several rousing ones before she succeeded in quieting the chatter.

"Friends," said Hal from the stage, "we have a puppet show for you tonight. It's nothing very fancy. My wife and I made the marionettes while we were still in high school and haven't worked with them much lately. But we thought you might get a kick out of seeing them."

Darkness fell, except for a spotlight that illuminated the tiny stage-upon-the-stage.

The blue velvet curtains were jerked back to reveal a cottage interior with a small table and two chairs.

"This is Peter," said Hal from the darkness, and a wizened, large-headed man in peasant's blouse and wooden shoes minced into the room. When he reached the center he turned a very square corner, bowed, turned again, and minced out.

"This is Joan," said Hal, and a little peasant woman repeated the ceremony, bobbing a curtsy.

"And this is the fairy." The fairy, floating and filmy, roused a happy sigh from the audience.

"Now the play will begin. It's called 'The Three Wishes,' and it's mostly for fun, but if there is a moral, it is that your third wish is of no value unless the first two have been the right ones.

"One day a woodcutter named Peter came home to his hut in the forest. He called loudly to his wife as he came in, for he was much excited —"

In only a few moments Dorinda was lost in the miniature world of the play. It was quite a shock when someone spoke into her ear.

"There aren't many fellows here," muttered Johnny, who had just sat down next to her. "Only little kids and that goody Ernest. I can't stand him, can you?"

Dorinda opened her mouth to emit a tremendous SHUSH. She remembered in time that shushes carry and decided instead to say, "Be still, you rattleheaded lug." That was the kind of thing she and Lib liked to say to boys, though usually, it is true, not in their hearing.

But then she remembered that this wasn't just a boy. It was Johnny, who had been with her at Swampy Point and who had come and sat down beside her because he wanted to.

"Ernest does seem a little repulsively saintly," Dorinda whispered back. Then she became lost once more in the play, which reached an impressive climax when a sausage

actually rose (out of a convenient apron pocket) in response to her husband's irritated wish and attached itself to the woman's nose.

One of the fairy's strings got tangled during her last appearance, and she had to sail off on one wing. Otherwise there were no hitches, and when the curtains closed and the lights went up again, there was a tumult of applause.

"Say, that was really cute," said Johnny.

Dorinda looked around to catch Portia's eye. Portia's face was as relaxed and happy as that of a child.

"Now we'll have some games," Terry announced. "Form in a circle, please, and Dorinda, may we have some music?"

Dorinda was a little sorry she had to play just then and couldn't go and take Portia's hand and be part of the game. But then, it was fun to watch the corner of the floor that came within her range and the scenes that shifted like a kaleidoscope. First, she saw Portia skipping past with the spry Mr. Sedgewick, both of them smiling with that self-forgetfulness that comes to people under the spell of music. Dr. Harpeman shuffled majestically past with Mrs. Olsen, and Dorinda nearly lost the rhythm when she saw Mrs. Jordan lumbering past with a suffering Johnny.

After that, there was a guessing game, one of those mysterious affairs in which everyone but the victim seems to be in on some deep and subtle knowledge that turns out at last to be a trifle like the color of someone's tie.

Occasional glances were beginning to wander toward the refreshment tables, where concentrated activity by Mrs. Jordan and a number of the girls promised imminent action.

Mr. Scott signaled Dorinda, and in the expectant hush announced, "Time to eat! Follow your partner to the refreshment table."

The crowd, with no shoving, but no hesitation either, prepared to obey. Big plates of hamburgers, pickles, and doughnuts could be seen, and the smell of cocoa and coffee permeated the air.

Just then on the stairs sounded a thunder of feet. With a yell, a mob of boys burst in at the doorway.

Both guests and hosts at the peaceful party were so astonished that they stood helpless, open-mouthed, while the boys rushed toward the tables and began snatching the food. For what seemed a long time nobody moved. Suddenly Mr. Scott seized a plate of doughnuts that was just being carried off, and then all the other men and boys sprang to the defense, too. In a moment the invaders had vanished, with considerable booty, all but one tall fellow who had been engaged in a fist fight by Ernest.

Mr. Scott dragged them apart. Ernest's shiny hair was well mussed now, and his clean pink face was scratched and bruised. His opponent shook off Mr. Scott's hand and stood there stiff and glowering.

He was a tall, slenderly built boy, his shoulders rather bent. He had a shock of curly dark hair and frowning blue eyes.

Dorinda felt dizzy for a minute when she looked at him. His face was so familiar, though she had never seen him before. He looked like Portia.

"Must be Freddy!" Johnny muttered.

Mr. Scott must have recognized him, too. "What's the idea?" he asked quietly. "You were invited to the party. Why didn't you come as the others did?"

"Come along with me, boy," said Dr. Harpeman. "We'll talk it over outside."

Freddy shook Dr. Harpeman's hand off his arm. "No thanks," he said. "I'm leaving right now."

While everyone was still watching him stalk out, a thin little voice piped up from the middle of the crowd. "Let's not let them bad boys think they've broke up our party," cried Mr. Sedgewick. "Let's do a little singing while things get straightened out. Does everybody know the old song of Barbary Allen?"

He began to sing in a strange quavering voice:

"In Scarlet Town, where I was born,
There was a fair maid dwellin', —"

Almost immediately Terry popped up on one side of him, Hal on the other, and soon everybody was singing or humming.

Then Mr. Scott was in front of them again. "That was grand, Mr. Sedgewick!" he cried. "Best part of the evening! Now let's go back to where we were so rudely interrupted. There are still a few doughnuts and plenty of coffee and cocoa, so let's eat! Don't waste any time!"

A spontaneous yell of approval greeted this announcement. Then everyone drank, and ate, and talked, and stayed, till Dr. Harpeman rose to speak.

"We thank you all for coming," he said. "We meant to give you a party, but I think you've given us one. I hope you'll feel this is your church. We of First Church have been wondering about a name for this church. Someone has suggested 'Friendship Church,' and we'd like to know how you all feel about it."

Mr. Sedgewick stood up. "Friendship is what you've showed us and what the church should give," he said. "I vote for 'Friendship Church'."

After a moment's pause, there was a great clapping of hands, while Dorinda was proud and delighted because they had chosen *her* name.

"Unofficially then, we are Friendship Church," said Dr. Harpeman. "Thank you all, and good night!"

The guests, little by little, went away, but the hosts still had the dishes and the cleaning up to do.

"Hey, kid, did you see Portia before she left?" Johnny asked, coming into the kitchen with a trayful of cups.

"No," said Dorinda anxiously. "She disappeared. Oh, Johnny, I wonder if she'll ever come back."

"What are you dopes talking about?" asked Susan, in her usual direct fashion.

Dorinda hesitated. But there was no use trying to cover it up. "The boy they caught was Portia's brother."

"So it was. So it was," said Terry slowly. "I thought there was something familiar about him. Oh, no wonder

Portia slipped out. She's so proud. She'll probably never want to come back."

"Do you suppose — do you suppose it would do any good for me to go down and see her?" Dorinda ventured. "Try to show her it doesn't matter as far as she's concerned?"

"Good idea!" cried Terry decisively. "But let me go along with you, Dorinda. Mr. Scott might want to go, but I think another girl — two girls — would have more chance to get somewhere."

"Well, I hope the old man next door doesn't come out and tie you up in knots or anything," said Johnny. "But that is a nice family. Kinda liked the looks of the brother, too, if he is a tough. But say, what about Ernest! Did he ever light into that bunch! Jumped 'em before I knew what was up. He was swell."

"And I just called him repulsively saintly," said Dorinda. "You can surely guess wrong about people."

"Don't I know it!" said Johnny. "For instance — well, skip it." He grinned at her. Dorinda's lips curved. She was sure Johnny was referring to her! Was she glad she hadn't snubbed him during the play!

"Well, kids, it was a good party," said Mr. Scott, sticking his head in the door.

"In spite of the juvenile delinquents," said Danny.

"Item one under new business," said Mr. Scott. "Next week we've got to get that basketball team going."



CHAPTER FIVE

Oh, are you going somewhere?" asked Mrs. Poole, coming into Dorinda's bedroom and dropping into the small, plump boudoir chair she had upholstered for Dorinda's last Christmas present.

Dorinda finished combing her hair with unusual care. "Yes, I am, Mother," she said.

"I thought maybe you'd like to go down to the Y.W. Festival of Nations with me," said Mrs. Poole. "But I suppose you're going to the church."

"Yes," said Dorinda briefly. "I'll be back in time for dinner. Good-by, Mum." She gave her mother a kiss and hurried out. It was strange to leave her mother sitting in that chair. Their roles were generally reversed — Dorinda curled up in the chair while her mother kissed her good-by and hurried down the stairs.

Well, Mother wouldn't sit there long. But there was a little pain that was half pleasant in Dorinda's heart. Mother had really wanted her to go to the Y.W.C.A. and was a little disappointed. Mother had often taken her along before, but perhaps she had never wanted to quite so much till Dorinda began to be busy, too, and live a life of her own.

But what really hurt was that she hadn't been honest. She hadn't told her mother where she was really going. Just like Bart, she thought, and then indignantly denied it. It wasn't like Bart! She was just trying not to worry Mother. She herself was sure Terry was an adequate chaperon, but she was just as sure Mother wouldn't think so.

In front of the church she found Terry. Dorinda looked at her doubtfully. Terry in her scarlet jumper and immaculate white blouse was like a picture out of *Vogue* magazine. Then she saw that Terry was looking doubtfully at her.

"Why did you dress up?" Terry inquired.

"Why — I didn't," Dorinda said, looking down at her turquoise skirt and polished oxfords. But she had dressed as carefully, she realized now, as she would for

any difficult interview — as if she had been called in by the school principal, for instance.

“Maybe we should have worn blue jeans,” said Terry.

“But that wouldn’t have been right, either,” Dorinda objected. “It would have looked as if we didn’t consider the visit — important.”

They were silent on the bus, both feeling that the adventure was of doubtful promise.

“I feel absolutely scared,” Dorinda said as they got off the bus, favored by an astonished stare from the bus driver, who was not used to depositing such well groomed young ladies at the bus stop for Swampy Point.

“It is a sinister-looking place,” Terry agreed, picking her way daintily along the muddy ruts. “Isn’t it just dreadful to think people have to live here?”

“Yes, but I didn’t mean that. I meant Portia. I — I know she’s going to make us feel like two cents, though I certainly don’t know why she should. Well, here we are. The old man isn’t looking out today, thank goodness.”

She knocked at the little gray door. She didn’t look at the windows, but from the corner of her eye she could see that the dingy curtains were moving. Terry pointed out the gulls wheeling above the river, and they watched them for the moment or two before the door opened.

Portia stood there, smouldering with unfriendliness.

“Hello!” said Dorinda, putting on a bright smile. “We — we came down to see you. This is Terry, you know. Mrs. Forrest.”

“You came down here all by yourself?” asked Portia

coolly. "Didn't the preacher bring you in his car? Weren't you scared something would get you? Or that you'd get those pretty clothes muddy?"

Dorinda felt her smile twitching as she struggled to maintain it.

"May we come in?" asked Terry gently. "Hello, kids, how are you?" She miraculously produced two packages of chewing gum and held them out.

Apollonia made a little motion toward them, then drew back. Howie stared unblinkingly over his protecting thumb. After an awkward moment, Terry laid the gum on the table.

"Your mother's not in right now?" asked Terry. Dumb and frozen beside her, Dorinda was overwhelmingly thankful Terry was along.

"Ma is delivering the ironing. She's a washerwoman," said Portia evenly. "We're pore white trash. My brother's a hoodlum. You don't need to waste your time on us."

Terry managed to produce a feeble little laugh. "Poor white trash! I don't believe it. From your name I imagine you're a descendant of one of this country's earliest settlers — one of our oldest families. Where did your people come from, Portia?"

Portia shot a suspicious glance at Terry. "From way down South. Tennessee. Smoky Mountains," she said. "But I can't remember the old place. We been on the move since I was just a little kid. It was only a shack anyways, I guess, and what good there was in the land had been wore out by my grandpappy's time."

"Just as I thought," Terry said triumphantly. "Your ancestors were probably old residents before Dorinda's and mine ever decided to leave the old country, speaking Elizabethan English when ours were gabbling brokenly. But naturally, that isn't very important now. *We're* important now." She laughed. "Dorinda says you have the sweetest sister. Could I — could I meet her, Portia?"

"I reckon," said Portia reluctantly. She led them through the portieres.

Missy was lying there smiling. She didn't show the least confusion or embarrassment, though she must have heard the whole disturbing conversation. But to Dorinda's anxious eyes she looked even thinner and more feverish than before.

"Hello, Missy," said Terry gently. "I'm Terry Forrest."

"Hello, Terry," said Missy. "Or I guess I should say Mis' Forrest. I'm real proud to see you. Hello, Dory."

Dory. Nicknames are friendly, Mr. Scott had said. Hers sounded so today. Missy's warm sweetness seemed emphasized by Portia's bitterness — yet it seemed in some confusing way part of the same flavor, like some fruit tastes are a blend of bitter and sweet.

"I found a few patterns for you," said Dorinda hesitantly, laying the magazines on the bed, strands of colored embroidery thread delicately folded inside.

Missy clapped her hands, and still brighter color burned on her cheeks. "Glory be!" she cried. She started to open the magazines, then pushed them aside tenderly.

"Where's my manners?" she asked. "Anyway, I don't want to waste your visit doing anything but visiting. I'll have plenty of time to look at the pretties. Please sit down."

There was a chair in the corner for Terry, and Dorinda perched on the side of the bed.

"Now, tell me about the party," Missy said. "Portia's so close-mouthed she hasn't told me a thing about it. And the least ones — generally they chatter like sparrows, but this time the cat's got their tongues."

Dorinda glanced at Portia and hastily away again. Portia's stern gaze told nothing, but it was evident that she had suppressed the news of Freddy's invasion.

"Well, there was a play, a puppet play," Dorinda said. "It was called 'The Three Wishes.'"

There was a small, sucking sound beside her, and she looked down, startled, at Howie, who had been so quiet she hadn't noticed he was standing beside her. The noise had been caused by the withdrawal of his thumb.

"Oh man, it shore was neat," said Howie.

His little voice was unexpectedly deep and his words astoundingly decisive. After a startled moment, all four girls broke into involuntary chuckles. Howie eyed them severely and replaced his thumb.

"They're death on stories," sighed Missy. "I've told them all I know a thousand times. I don't quite recollect the one you mention."

"The lady got a sausage on her nose," Apollonia contributed. Encouraged by Howie's sally she became quite

loquacious. "And then he had to wish it off again. The fairy was real purty."

Pop! Out came the thumb again. "*Real* neat," said Howie. In again went the thumb.

"You tell Missy the story," begged Apollonia. She turned, to Dorinda's secret elation, not to Terry, but to her.

"Well, it was about a man and his wife," Dorinda began awkwardly. "They lived in the woods." She never had told a story before. But these eager, starved-looking eyes did something to her. She began to try to make the story interesting. "He was a woodcutter and had been very poor all his life. He lived in a little hut in the woods. . . ."

Howie leaned against Dorinda's knee. His unoccupied left hand, stubby and grimy, began to stroke the silky wool of her skirt. Apollonia listened with frowning concentration and occasional assenting nods as the different stages of the story of the fairy's gift of three wishes to the woodcutter and his wife unfolded properly.

"They're so beautiful," Dorinda thought, as she talked. "If you could only brush and brush their hair and feed them vitamins and give them games and clothes and fun. . . ." She ached to do this, painfully, almost as she had been aching to do something to help Missy.

"Then the woodcutter's wife found there was nothing in the house to eat, and in spite of her excitement she was terribly hungry. So — she forgot all about the fairy, and she said, 'I wish I had a sausage.' "

Apollonia heaved a deep sigh.

"And there it was — the largest, most beautiful sausage you ever saw, right on the table."

Pop! "Cooked?" asked Howie earnestly.

"Yes, and smelling heavenly," said Dorinda. "But the smell only angered the woodcutter, and quick as a wink, before he had time to think, he cried, 'I wish it were on your nose!'"

"Oh, land!" said Missy. "The poor creature!"

"And it was, of course. Then the wife scolded and the husband apologized. And he explained to her how (with the third wish) he would get all the money in the world and then he could build her a beautiful home with thick rugs and rich furniture and lovely gardens, and he would have the best jeweller in the world make a sausage-case for her nose, all gold and diamonds. And she could have everything in the world she wanted — if only she'd keep the sausage.

"But the more he talked, the angrier she grew, until at last she said, 'I don't want anything in the whole world if I have to go about always with this sausage on my nose.' And she stood up and said in a loud voice, 'I wish the sausage would fly up the chimney!' And it did!"

Howie stuck his head into the bedclothes and shook with laughter, and Missy mussed his hair lovingly and smiled.

But Apollonia looked as if she would cry. "Oh, dear, if only they had wished first for the money or the nice house! Oh, dear!"

"Maybe that wouldn't have been the best thing to wish for first, anyways," said Portia seriously. "Did you take notice of what the man said beforehand, Dory? He said your first wish and your second wish have to be right in order to make the third one right. I have thought about that considerable."

"I'd wish for the nice house first," said Apollonia longingly.

"Seems as if it would be better to wish first for everybody to be well," said Portia.

While they were talking about it, several wishes of her own had flown at random through Dorinda's mind.

"I would wish to be pretty and popular," she thought. "I would wish to have Mother and Dad proud of me as they are of Bart. That's two wishes. But oh, most of all, I'd wish to have our family a real family again, all loving and trusting one another and having fun together —"

But Missy was shaking her head hard, and for the first time Dorinda saw her meager face without the smile that warmed and softened it. "You-all know you should wish first for everyone to be good," she said quite passionately. "And all the rest shall be added unto you. You-all remember that."

"Our grandpa on Ma's side was a preacher," said Portia dryly. "Ma always did say Missy takes after him."

Missy laughed. "We're just about as silly as the folks in the tale. Wishing away here as if we had a fairy of our own. I reckon it's good hard work that gets you what you want instead of all this wishing."

"That's a fairy tale, too," said Portia scornfully. "Don't you know how Freddy says? Cards is all stacked against some people, and you can work yourself to death and it don't do a bit of good. Recollect how Pa worked, Missy? How we all worked in the fields, picking beans and such? What did we ever get out of that?"

"The rain falls on the just and the unjust," said Missy sadly. "It don't help to be angry at the clouds, like Freddy is. He gets that from the Sage."

"The *Sage*?" echoed Terry in perplexity.

"Oh, sure, you don't know the Sage," said Portia. Her brows relaxed and her clear blue eyes took on the shine of laughter. "He calls himself the Sage of Swampy Point. He's kind of cracked but knows everything there is to know. He lives next door."

"Next door? Oh, we saw him!" Dorinda cried. "An old man with a beard?"

"Land, yes! He looks odd, but he's really learned. He's got information pasted all over the wall, but that's nothing to what's inside his head. Did you see that thing sticking out of his roof? That's a telescope. He lets all of us look through it sometimes and points out all kinds of stars I can't never see, but I pretend I do."

"Why, when we knocked —" Dorinda began.

"He run you off, didn't he?" Portia chuckled. "Does that when the Welfare or anybody comes poking around. But he's real nice to us Swampy Pointers."

"Portia!" whispered Apollonia. Everybody turned to look at her, and she dropped her eyes in embarrassment

and seemed to try to work herself, by means of a screwing toe, down through a crack in the floor.

"Yes, Polly, speak up," said Portia.

Apollonia cast her an agonized look, and then whispered desperately, "Is it all right *now* for us to take the gum the lady brought us?"

Again the four girls laughed together, and Apollonia and Howie, taking laughter for consent, scampered to get the gum.

"Portia's downright ornery sometimes. I don't know why," Missy said serenely. "Her bark's worse than her bite, though. Now with Freddy, it's t'other way round." Her gaze seemed to travel far away. How much did Missy know? "He don't say nothing, but sometimes I worry about him. . . . It was mighty good of you to come. Thanks for what you brought me, and come again if ever you can. Your visit was a wonderful treat."

Portia went to the door with them and stepped out, closing it behind her. She looked at the ground and laced her fingers nervously together.

"I reckon I was mighty rude," she murmured. "I know now you meant nothing but kindness. And it did Missy lots of good."

"Oh, I wish we could really do her some good," Dorinda said impulsively. Something inside warned her away from the subject, but she could not refrain from making some effort to help. "Does the doctor say —"

"We got no doctor for her," said Portia grimly. "Go on! Say it! It's a crime to leave her get worse and worse

like this. It's Ma. The Welfare sent a doctor down to look at Missy, and he said she'd got to go away, right off. Ma couldn't bear it, because that's what happened to Pa. They took him off to the sanitarium and he never come back. So now we don't let the doctor come no more."

Dorinda stared at her in a kind of horror. A person's *mother* not letting the doctor come, nor allowing her to have the treatment she so desperately needed! And Mrs. Carnarvon had looked so kind and sensible. Dorinda saw now beyond the kindness, fear and grief and lack of understanding that appalled her.

Terry changed the subject. It was the only thing to do; but what she said made both girls look at her in surprise.

"I wonder if we could pay a call on the Sage?"

Portia shook her head in wonder. "I don't know as you could," she warned. "I told you how he feels about outsiders."

"I think I'll try, anyway," said Terry. "Good-by, Portia, and remember that we'll pick you up for choir practice Wednesday evening at seven-thirty!"

She took the few steps to the house next door and knocked. Dorinda had to follow, but her heart beat hard.

The sagging door was opened with a jerk, and the Sage stood there looking at them. He was a bearded, baleful-eyed old man, sure enough, but he was not quite so formidable and terrifying as Dorinda had

thought him at first glimpse. However, he looked quite unfriendly.

"I am not interested," he announced. "I can't afford to buy anything, and I can afford even less to accept charity. I don't want anything you could possibly offer. I am free of debts, I am hale and hearty, and my soul is in good condition."

Terry laughed spontaneously. "I'm sure it is," she agreed. "And I'm not offering you anything — I'm asking for something. All I want is a little advice. Do you suppose you could help me?"

"I don't get it," said the Sage, losing his majestic manner for a moment. "You've been calling on the Carnarvons?"

"Yes," said Terry patiently. "May we come in?"

Dorinda followed her fearfully as the Sage reluctantly stepped out of the doorway. The little room was crowded with heavy old oak furniture, and the wall, of pink building paper, was almost covered with clippings and sketches. Even the neatly made cot was loaded with boxes and books, which Dorinda imagined him moving at night to the tiny free floor space in the middle of the room.

"Understand," said the Sage, facing around to them fiercely, "I don't conspire against my friends!"

"Oh, dear!" Terry cried. "Why should you think we want to hurt them? They're our friends, too, and if friends can't give one another a hand now and then, it's a strange world. For instance, can't we do something to

help Freddy? It seems to us he might be in need of friends just now."

"That's just what I thought, just exactly what I thought," muttered the Sage. He paced back and forth the best he could in the tiny space he had for pacing. "Wait till a boy's in trouble and come to sing hymns over him. You don't understand. I guess you can't understand."

He stood still for a moment with frowning brows.

"I'm going to tell you some things in confidence," he said. "I can rely on your confidence. I know your kind." (In spite of this, he did not sound admiring.) "I'll tell you something about these people down here. There are the Banes and the Roccas and the Servis, but I'll not tell you about them. There are some things you don't need to know. You've got acquainted with the Barnhardts and the Sedgewicks?"

The girls nodded.

"You think you know them. And they, with the Carnarvons, are the best of the lot. Did you know that both the Barnhardts and the Sedgewicks operate box traps?"

The girls looked perfectly blank. "*Box traps?*"

"They're a kind of net that's illegal. They catch too many fish — don't give the fish a sporting chance. Well, does that shock you? It's against the law. But I'll tell you what is not against the law: starvation. Wing Barnhardt — did you notice he has only one arm? — that's why he can't keep a job. So he catches fish — illegally. John

Sedgewick is whole enough — but there isn't enough of him. He sells all the strength he has, every day (strength is all you can sell when you only finished the third grade in school), but it isn't worth enough to feed his family. So he catches fish illegally, too. And sometimes Wing gets foxy and sneaks down and gets the fish out of the nets first. Then they have a fight — the little man and the man with one arm, and there's bad blood on Swampy Point for a while."

He paused, but even Terry was speechless. Even looking on Swampy Point's ugliness, even knowing the Carnarvons' troubles, had not prepared her for this.

"I guess you've not met Shorty Brown?" he asked. "No, you wouldn't. You'd best not. Shorty's an unsavory character that nice girls shouldn't meet. You can't blame his wife for running off; but it was not good to leave two boys for Shorty to bring up. And that brings us to the Carnarvons."

He paced again, angrily. "You know the Carnarvons. Are they evil? Turned out of their own land, flung out on the highways, there's plenty like 'em, sold, you might say, for farm machinery that can do the work cheaper than people. They tramped the road for days — it was all they could do — slept in ditches, and kept alive on the few days' miserable wages they could get picking somebody else's harvest. They lived in pig sties, drank dirty water, and ate spoiled food. When such people get sick, they're taken away from their families to die in strange, cold, lonely places." He snorted.

"You talk about Freddy. Fine boy, intelligent boy. What does society do with him? Flings him in a garbage pail, tosses him on a dump. Then, when it's too late, you and your kind come mincing around with a handkerchief to your noses trying to pull him out. Freddy starts running with the Brown boys. Surely; who else will have anything to do with a boy from Swampy Point? He starts hanging out at Club 98. Surely; where else is there to go? You can be sure there's a place like Club 98 waiting for him, though; be sure there's a respectable man like Korte ready to take his pennies, even though they're only pennies and don't even make a profit. Korte can afford it; he's got plenty of high-brow joints uptown that do make money."

"Korte?" whispered Dorinda. "Did you say — Korte?"

"Owner of Club 98," said the old man. "That's the sinkhole where the boys go down. Oh, I've told you only a little of it. But do you think your rose water can sweeten such a mess?" And he cried out sonorously, "All the perfumes of Arabia cannot cleanse these stuffed bosoms of their perilous grief."

Terry turned blindly to him. "But is there nothing we can do?"

"Do?" he uttered a short grunt. "You might get a telescope. That's what I do. Look at the stars."

He stumped over and held the door open for them.

When they had walked along the road a few feet in silence, Dorinda spoke.

"I've changed my wishes," she said in a choked voice.

"My first wish now is that we can somehow rescue Portia and her family from — from this awful Swampy Point. And all the others, if we can."

She'd changed her second wish, too, but she didn't tell Terry that. "I wish that Bart may somehow get out of this tangle he is in." The name Korte on the Sage's lips had confirmed her worst fears about Bart.

But the third wish was the same. She just couldn't change the third wish, even if it was a selfish one. Somehow, all this made her even more lonely for her own people. "To have the family all together again, interested in the same things, and mattering to one another — oh, wouldn't that be heavenly!"

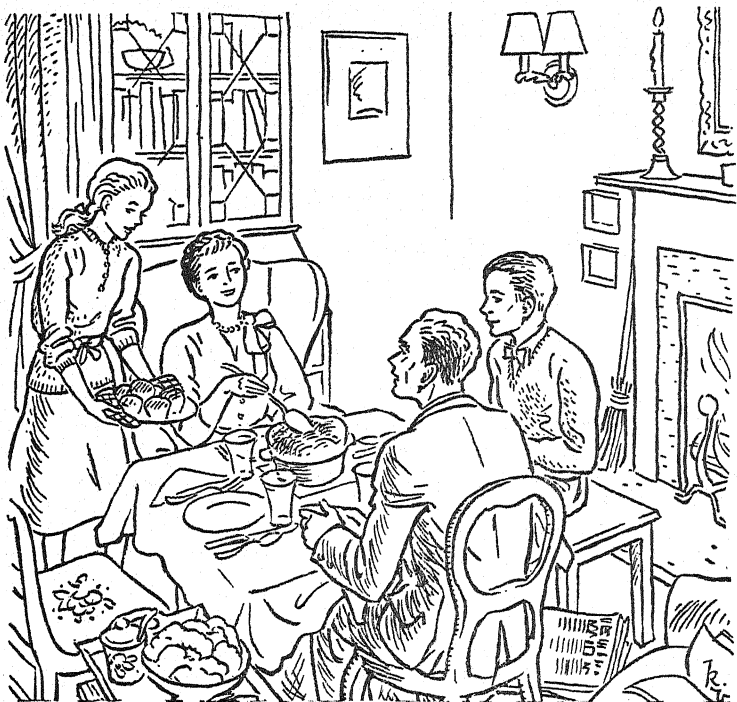
"Remember what Missy told us!" said Terry briskly. "Wishing isn't much good, but hard work is!"

Evening was almost upon them. The sky was frosty-white, red at the horizon, and the river was streaming with pink.

"There are some wild ducks flying overhead," said Terry.

"Oh, so many!" Dorinda cried, looking far, far up into the sky where a V of flying birds, wavering in shape as it moved, trailed a great distance to each side.

How could life be so ugly, terrifying, strange, and so beautiful all at the same time and in the same place?



CHAPTER SIX

*I*t was dark when Dorinda got home. She leaped up the steps three at a time, as she used to when she was a little girl, and burst in the front door, as if all the troubles of Swampy Point were close behind and this were her sanctuary.

"Mother!" she shouted. Then she noticed something unusual in the atmosphere — the smell of wood smoke.

"Hi," said Bart, prone on the floor over the paper. "Look what Mom dreamed up. A winter picnic!"

Beyond him Dorinda saw the drop-leaf table opened out with a yellow cover and dishes on it, and the fire lighted on the hearth.

"She's enticing us back to our childhood," said Bart, sitting up and eying his sister curiously. "How about it? You going to confess?"

"Confess?" Dorinda echoed indignantly. "What on earth are you talking about?" Bart was just the same as ever, yet when Dorinda looked at him she could think only, "Club 98, Club 98, Club 98."

"Why, it just so happens," Bart chuckled, "that Mother sent me down to the church to pick you up. Mr. Scott told me you hadn't been there all afternoon."

"What did you tell Mother?" Dorinda asked, aghast.

"I covered up for you, Sister dear, with a good deal more — well, you might say presence of mind than you showed on one occasion I could mention."

"Of all things!" Dorinda cried. "It isn't the same thing at all. Why, I'm going to tell her all about it right away."

"I'll be all ears," said Bart.

Dorinda tossed her head and went into the kitchen. "Oh, Mother, I have so many things to tell you," she said. The tragedies of Swampy Point, the conversation with the girls, and her anxiety about Missy, the Sage, the lovely sky and the flying ducks were all spilling over — she didn't know which to tell first.

"Good, darling. So Mr. Scott finally let you go? Bart says you were doing a lot of mimeographing for the new

church. Carry in these rolls, Honey. Won't it be cozy to have a winter picnic?"

Dorinda, carrying in the rolls, faced Bart's mocking eyes blankly. How was she going to explain now?

"Here comes Dad," said Mother. "Thank goodness, we can start right away, and the soufflé won't be spoiled."

The fire leaped and crackled, the cheese soufflé that Dorinda and Bart had always loved was as delicious as ever. There was a crisp green salad and plenty of hot rolls and jam.

Dorinda tried to think up a good opening for her story. "*Mother, I didn't really go to the church today. I really went down to Swampy Point. Bart was only kidding.*"

But that would put Bart on the spot. Dad would have to know all about it, and he would really be hard on Bart. And Bart had been trying to protect her — or had he? She looked over at him miserably. His eyes were dancing. He was teasing her. Dorinda took careful aim (she remembered just how) and kicked, avoiding the table legs.

"Why, you little demon!" shouted Bart, clutching his shin in pain.

"Dorinda! What's got into you!" cried Mother. "I thought we'd have such fun tonight."

"This is really like old times," said Dad dryly, opening his newspaper.

All the time she was drying dishes for Mother after Bart and Dad had gone, Dorinda kept trying to begin her confession and her story. But it was so hard to begin

unraveling the tangled web in the atmosphere of running water and clattering dishes. She would wait till the dishes were done.

When the last dish was put away, the last counter wiped clean, Mother glanced around, turned out the light, and said, "Let's go sit by the fire a while. It seems as if we never get a chance just to sit down and talk."

It should have been the perfect time for confidences, but as Dorinda sat on a hassock and looked at the fire, she felt tongue-tied. The bubbling spring of things she had to say seemed to have all dried up.

Mother, too, seemed constrained and depressed. She rocked and tapped her foot, and the firelight etched worried shadows on her brow.

"I wish I knew whether Bart was really going to that rehearsal he said he was going to tonight," she said. "It's dreadful not to be able to rely on what he says any more. You are such a comfort to me, Dorinda, because I know you're absolutely trustworthy."

Dorinda shut her lips tighter. Well, that settled it! She couldn't possibly say anything now.

"It's wonderful to be young, Dorinda," said Mother, "and not to have any problems. I seem to have so many just now. There's one that worries me awfully — it may be a matter of life and death, and I just don't know how to handle it."

She was broodingly silent again. Dorinda couldn't stand it any longer. No problems, indeed!

"I've got to study, Mother," she said, jumping up.

"Thank you for fixing the wonderful winter picnic."

She settled herself at her desk, but somehow all she could seem to think about was the time when Captain, the puppy she and Bart had shared and loved, had had his paw run over and had run to them trembling and tried to wag his tail. The pain of that had struck deep into her, like the troubles of the Carnarvons now, because Captain was so gallant and she so helpless. But then she had had Bart to share her sorrow. And where was Bart now? Lost in some far and strange life where she could not find him.

She couldn't possibly concentrate on her studying, so she got up restlessly and went to her mirror to fix her hair a new way. She combed and fussed with it and finally arranged it with fluffy bangs across the forehead that piquantly emphasized her wide-set eyes and pointed chin.

"It looks just darling, Dorinda!" said Katy the next day.

Mary Ann and Katy were waiting for her in the hall when she came into the high school. They often waited for her now, and so did Susan, and sometimes Johnny and Danny would join them in the cafeteria. That very day it happened again.

"What a lunch!" Susan groaned as Johnny set off his tray a bowl of chili, a slice of lemon meringue pie, and a huge mound of chocolate cake.

"My mother feeds me rabbit food. I have to catch up on my calories somehow," said Johnny. "Say, did you

hear the latest? Mr. Scott's called a special meeting before choir practice."

"Oh!" cried Dorinda. Terry must have talked to Mr. Scott already, she guessed.

They all looked at her curiously, while she thought as fast as she could. The Sage had told them about the box traps in confidence — and trusted them — so she couldn't possibly disclose this spicy story, though she ached to. But it wouldn't do any harm to describe the visit to Portia.

"So you did go! You're really on the beam," said Johnny, when she had finished.

"I wish this basketball Saturday mornings would get this Freddy lug," said Danny, shaking his head. "But I don't know if we'll even have enough guys to play."

"Why? Hasn't anybody gotten in touch with the fellows?"

"Oh, sure, Mr. Scott sent out notices. Talked to some of the boys, too. But gosh!" Johnny waved a sandwich argumentatively. "What have we got to offer? A few crumby players like Danny and me — ouch, Danny — and Mr. Scott for a coach! Well, I ask you!"

"Can we help it if we're the intellectual type?" growled Danny. Danny was stocky and broad-faced and excelled in wrestling.

"Isn't Mr. Scott a good coach?" asked Mary Ann. "He played basketball in college. I've heard my Dad say so."

"Oh, I guess he's O.K.," Johnny conceded, "but

you know, to appeal to these Dead End kids, you got to have something out of the ordinary. Now Dory, the thing I'd like to know is — how about Bart? Everybody's heard of him."

"Oh, gee, kids, he's hopeless," Dorinda answered, shaking her head. "There wouldn't be any use my even suggesting it to him."

"Well, if I were a boy," boomed Susan, "I'd go and haul those kids in by force. I'm ashamed of you guys. Aren't you, Dory?"

Dorinda nodded abstractedly. "Club 98," she was thinking. "Freddy and Bart. How could Bart have been drawn into that awful place when he's had every chance in the world?"

"Do you — do you mind if we call you Dory?" Mary Ann asked hesitantly.

Dorinda blinked into broad attentiveness. They were all looking at her. "Why, sure not!" she said, clumsily but happily. "Nicknames are friendly."

The meeting before choir practice was exactly what Dorinda had thought it would be.

"I believe we need to extend our program," said Mr. Scott. "Many of our church leaders agree with me. We want to serve our Friendship Church members at the points where they need us most. I believe we can plan a Saturday morning program that both boys and girls will enjoy. Why shouldn't we have clubs for boys and girls, with woodwork classes for the boys and sewing classes for the girls, as well as games? Why shouldn't we

start an orchestra? There are people in the church who can help us with all these things. And why shouldn't these young people help us prepare the room for church? It's their church, and we've been cutting them out of half the fun."

"Those are wonderful ideas!" cried Susan, forgetting, in her interest, to clown. "I just love to sew — though you wouldn't believe it. And do you know who would help us with that? Mrs. Jordan. She's the best-hearted old thing — if you creep up on the blind side."

"Mr. Reichert, who teaches manual training over at the high, is a right guy," said Danny. "And how about some wrestling?" He struck a muscular pose. "Manliest sport there is!"

"We could start with aprons," Mary Ann planned busily, "and I bet Dad could get us feed sacks to work on. Oh, this will be twice as much fun as it was before!"

"We'll get the Board of Education of the church to draw us up a plan and secure leaders," said Mr. Scott, noting down their suggestions. "Well, I guess it's time for choir practice! Here comes Hal with the first load of warblers."

Dorinda looked eagerly toward the doorway. There was Portia, along with Mr. Sedgewick and the two oldest Barnhardt girls.

"This is a wonderful bunch," said Terry enthusiastically when they were assembled. "If only we had a few more boys, though."

Ernest said hesitantly, "I know a boy with a swell

voice. Wish he'd come. Freddy Carnarvon. Why don't you get him to come, Portia?"

Dorinda and Terry glanced at each other anxiously, and then at Portia who wore her formidable expression.

"I don't reckon Freddy wants to come," she said.

"Well, why don't you ask him, Ernest?" suggested Terry briskly. "Sometimes a boy won't pay much attention to his sister, you know, but another fellow can make an impression on him."

"Gosh, he wouldn't think of coming for me," Ernest said hastily. "Might if Johnny asked him."

"O.K., if I have time," said Johnny, rolling his eyes frightfully. "I only have six exams coming up next week. Never cracked a book for two or three courses. Oh, sure, I have plenty of time."

"Well, let's get started," suggested Terry.

They worked hard for a while, then Terry said, "Portia, will you sing that passage alone, please?"

After a quick, pondering look, Portia nodded. Dorinda played the phrase that introduced the passage, and Portia sang.

Her voice was round and full and lovely. When she finished, there was a sudden spontaneous spatter of applause from the other choir members.

"Fine!" said Terry. "That's good. Now let's try it from the beginning, with the solo by Portia."

Dorinda began again, her contentment almost overflowing. This would do Portia good. Perhaps Freddy might even come to hear his sister sing.

But on Sunday Dorinda's elation was rudely shattered. When the prelude was over and the choir seated, Terry came over and murmured in Dorinda's ear.

"We'll have to do the anthem without the solo, Dory. Portia isn't here."

"Isn't here?" Dorinda almost spoke out loud in her surprise. "Is she sick or something?"

"No. When she didn't show up at Sunday school, Mr. Scott drove down to see. They wouldn't let him in the house, and the Sage came out and laid him low. Hush! The invocation."

Dorinda went through the service mechanically, but she had no idea what Mr. Scott's subject was that morning. Over and over she asked herself, "What has happened since Wednesday night? What *could* have happened?"



CHAPTER SEVEN

A church business meeting had been called, preceded by a covered-dish dinner.

Between her father and mother, Dorinda went up the steps of the parish house into the church dining room. Dad carried a basket, and Mother nodded, greeting people right and left. They passed the usual groups of men standing around and talking, the usual flocks of women scurrying around the tables and the kitchen, the usual gangs of children and young people tearing around on unrelated schemes of their own. It was just the same as ever, yet how different!

For there, among the men, was Mr. Scott, erect and vibrant as ever, to toss the smile of a well known friend to Dorinda; and there, among the women, was Mrs. Jordan, setting scalloped potatoes on the table and talking as fast as ever she could. Without stopping, she waved to Dorinda. And there was Miss Rourke pouring coffee. And there were the kids.

"Hi, Dory!" They swept along the hall and surrounded her — Mary Ann and Susan and Katy. "Sit with us, won't you?"

And there they were, in line together, jiggling around, chattering and giggling, helping themselves to spaghetti and beans from casseroles and to molded salads.

"Now I haven't any room for cake!" wailed Susan, surveying her loaded plate with sorrow as she paused before the many varieties of cake and pie on the dessert end of the table.

"Shove your meat loaf over. You'd better take what you want now. I don't trust those boys," advised Katy.

They found places at a table where several of their friends were already sitting, were all silent together for the grace by Dr. Harpeman, and then began eating and chattering busily again.

When roped in on these occasions before, Dorinda had looked with silent scorn at such proceedings from an isolated position between her parents and had considered the chatterers a flock of rattlebrained nincompoops. But now it seemed quite different. Part of the time they talked about things that were important, and if they

rattled on between times, it was only because they felt too much at ease with one another to have to choose their words or try to be clever.

"I was sure glad to see you come in, Dory," said Susan, already polishing off her plate with gusto. "I thought you folks didn't come to these dinners very often."

"We don't," admitted Dorinda, recalling times when she had, in a tantrum, refused to come, and more times when Mother and Dad had other engagements. "But Dr. Harpeman called up and especially asked us to come. Said it was a most important meeting. What do you suppose it's all about?"

Mary Ann leaned across the table. "It's something about Friendship Church," she said.

Heads drew together, and food was almost forgotten.

"Maybe Mr. Hornby's laying for it," said Johnny. "I know he thinks it costs too much."

They all peered at Mr. Hornby, a small, fastidious man eating cherry pie.

"Why, how *can* he?" Dorinda asked, in shock. And then she remembered her father's cautious, negative reaction to the idea. But she had thought of Daddy's opposition as chronic and mild and had assumed that the church — the church in general — was always in favor of pushing out its boundaries and helping and teaching more and more people.

Now she looked around fearfully at all the grown-up people eating and talking all in their own different ways

and realized that there was no church in general but only individual people and that the fate of Friendship Church might indeed be in the balance.

So it was with a feeling of high excitement that Dorinda sat down again after helping to clear the table and watched Dr. Harpeman open the meeting. It was more exciting than the theater. In a play the action was all determined ahead of time — here, nobody knew what might happen!

“We’ll have a short service of devotions,” said Dr. Harpeman, “before we turn to the matter of business that is in hand tonight. I’ll read from *Isaiah* 61 a message that we have all heard, but that needs to come again and again to each of us personally.

“‘The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.’

“Let each of us pray silently,” said Dr. Harpeman, “while these words ring in our minds.”

“Good tidings unto the meek — Missy; proclaim liberty to the captives — Freddy and his gang, and the Barnhardtts and Sedgewicks with their box traps; bind up the brokenhearted — Portia and her mother,” thought Dorinda.

“Now we shall hear reports on Friendship Church. I’ll turn the meeting over to Mr. Scott,” said Dr. Harpeman.

"The chairman of the Board of Education, Miss Rourke, will give us the first report," announced Mr. Scott.

"Our board has had the task of organizing the new Sunday school," said Miss Rourke in her impressive way. "We have established six classes, secured regular teachers, and registered fifty pupils. Our average attendance is not so large as this, and the children are nervous and very hard to teach. But I think it's worth while. I'll tell you just one story.

"One little boy in my class is especially difficult. He's a thin, jumpy little fellow, who makes you think more of a wild animal than a boy. I was sure I'd never get anywhere with him; he always seemed to be making spitballs while I was trying to teach the lesson. One Sunday he lingered after class so long that I finally asked him if he had something he wanted to tell me. 'Yes,' he said. 'It's about my mama. She just sits at home and cries all the time. You always want to help people, and I thought maybe you could help her, because my daddy and I don't know how.' We found out that his mother was indeed in need of help, and Mr. Scott succeeded in persuading her to visit the mental hygiene clinic, where they feel they are already assisting her."

Miss Rourke paused and looked around at her intent audience. "I — I think it's worth while," she finished simply.

"Mrs. Sedgewick?" Dorinda murmured to Mary Ann. "Oh, I'm glad she's better."

"Thank you, Miss Rourke," said Mr. Scott. "Mrs. Jordan, will you tell us about the recent social?"

"Well, we really had a grand time," said Mrs. Jordan, beginning to talk even before her ponderous rising was completed. "Had seventy-five there, and it all turned out fine, in spite of a gang that tried to break it up. (I'd like to whale the lot of them!) The good kids are fine, though, and I'm really enthusiastic about the Saturday morning program we're setting up now."

"The young people have taken hold of this project with a spirit that is truly impressive," said Mr. Scott, after waiting a moment to see if Mrs. Jordan was really through. "In looking after our temporary church, in helping with the choir and other parts of the service, and in making friends, above all, with the other young people, they have been indispensable, and it's been a real experience for them. I'd like Mary Ann Grieve to tell you something about it."

Mary Ann had been growing more and more nervous as her turn approached. Now she rose, pale and determined, clutching a slip of paper.

"It is — it is a real pleasure to be able to speak for the High School Fellowship," she said in her soft, earnest voice, her eyes glued on her notes. "I am very proud to have the honor. And we have all felt it an — we have all felt honored to be able to do this work together. We have had lots of fun and made many new friends, and — and we really feel it is the most inspiring thing we have ever done in our lives."

Dorinda watched Mary Ann as she sank back into her seat, suffused with relief and rosiness, and gulped a drink of water. A little murmur of appreciation rose and fell across the room. Once Dorinda would have thought that a very dumb report. As a matter of fact, Mary Ann hadn't said a thing; but, somehow, what Mary Ann *was* said a good deal.

Mr. Scott stood up again. He looked around the room and was so slow in beginning to speak that all attention focused on him, almost apprehensively.

"You have heard some rather wonderful reports, I think," said Mr. Scott. "Our Saturday morning clubs were planned to provide a balanced program of study and activity. And I would also like to tell you about some of our dreams."

Planned to! Dreams! The young people cast uneasy glances at one another.

"Far in the future we saw still greater possibilities. We envisaged a day nursery, which would release working mothers from worry and at the same time nurture their children in the Christian principles we believe produce a more abundant life. We even dared hope to arouse civic conscience about the bad housing conditions; we hoped not only to lift the people of Swampy Point, but to destroy the evils of Swampy Point itself."

"What's he talking about? What's the matter?" whispered Dorinda frantically.

"But at this moment," Mr. Scott continued, "our hopes have received a serious blow. The school board, which

had granted us the use of Washington School auditorium on Saturdays and Sundays, has informed us they will require the room themselves on Saturdays, beginning with the next semester. They need it for a seminar for the teachers. In short, we are evicted."

Dorinda and the others sat in stunned silence. They had never expected anything like this.

The small, dry man named Hornby got up. "Watch this," groaned Johnny.

"I don't understand," said Mr. Hornby. He had a New England accent that gave his words distinction and authority among the prevailing midwestern speech. "As I see it, you are still permitted use of the building on Sundays. Surely this is the vital point."

Dorinda saw her mother get up and clasped her hands tightly and apprehensively.

"You're quite right, Mr. Hornby," said Mother in her warm sympathetic voice. "It is the vital point. A program of worship services is really all Friendship Church is equipped to carry on; and is such a program really going to serve these people? What is really needed in that area where juvenile delinquency and illness and poverty abound is a full-fledged social service center, backed by city government."

Mr. Hornby looked gratified and puzzled at the same time; other people looked impressed. *Oh, Mother!* thought Dorinda.

"You should have put out a little propaganda around home," whispered Johnny.

"Mr. Hornby and Mrs. Poole," boomed Mrs. Jordan, "I don't agree with either of you. You're both smarter than I am, but neither one of you has visited the new church nor helped on Saturday mornings as I have. If you had, you might feel different. I'm in favor of going all out for Friendship Church, and if we have to get a new building, why, let's dig down and get it."

Johnny clapped loudly, and Dorinda felt encouraged as she saw how many people turned to smile at him.

An old white-haired, kind-faced man, whom Dorinda had always heard referred to as "Daddy Darnmore," rose to speak. Even Dorinda had always enjoyed his Sunday morning handshake and radiant smile. Surely he would speak for Friendship Church!

"I love the Lord and his work," said Daddy Darnmore in his frail old voice. "But I always figure you have to be practical. The Lord helps those who help themselves. Where is the money coming from?"

"As a member of the school board," said a tall, distinguished man, "I feel I really should say that one of our reasons for withdrawing the Saturday use of the building was an actual increase of delinquency in the area. Perhaps you all know a raid was made on the party given down there at Friendship Church."

Then everybody seemed to want to talk. Dorinda was surprised again and again at what was said and as often delighted as she was disappointed. These people whom she had known all her life and had thought of as dull and

uninteresting were suddenly taking on personality and vividness.

Finally, Mrs. Poole got up again. Dorinda knew her mother was tired of the indecisiveness of the discussion and was going to resolve it in her efficient, knowing way.

"We've talked a lot of feelings but very few facts," she said. "You have another six weeks before the present accommodations are withdrawn. Why don't we see what you can do in that time — whether you can break up the gang of boys or really help with the other problems? And suppose we make an actual survey of the people affected to see how much they want and will make use of the church."

"And how about a committee to conduct the survey, including Mrs. Poole and Mr. Hornby?" suggested Mr. Scott. The motion was made and carried. Then Mr. Scott said, "There is a group here tonight who have been mentioned several times, and from whose representative we have heard. I dare say the outcome of our considerations will mean more to them than to any of the rest of us, and that our success, if we attain it, will be in large part due to them. In short, our young folks. Stand up, kids, and let us look at you."

The young people stood up. The whole room broke into a roar of applause. Dorinda felt the tears start to her eyes. In a funny, illogical, but convincing way she felt as if all the boys and girls around her were her brothers and sisters, and all the proud grown people applaud-

ing them were her aunts and uncles and grandparents.

"But applause isn't facts," mourned Johnny as they gathered to discuss it afterwards. "Freddy and his gang worry me."

"We don't have to stop working just because the outcome is in doubt," said Mr. Scott determinedly. "Can you all give a little time to calling this week? I think we might organize some of the key members of Friendship Church to do some enlistment of new members. For instance, Mrs. Olsen, the Van Burens, and Mr. Sedgewick."

"I'd like to go and see Mrs. Olsen," Dorinda offered.

"Dorinda, are you ready?" called Mother from the door. She waved at the others. "Sorry I had to vote against you tonight. I wasn't voting against *you*, you know."

Dorinda couldn't help forgiving her mother, especially when, after they had gotten into the car, she sighed happily and said, "Now that was as nice a church fight as I've seen in years. Nothing nasty, but everybody roused enough to stand up on his hind legs and argue. I don't know but that was why I said what I did — just to get a good argument going."

"I suppose you're right," said Dad, "and I'm sure it isn't a very sensible venture from an economic point of view, but somehow I have a sneaking sympathy for Friendship Church and the kids."

"Why, Daddy!" cried Dorinda, quite stunned. She took a moment for recovery, then pressed her advantage.

"Daddy, how do people in bad housing situations — like Swampy Point — get moved into better ones — like Lowestoft?"

"They make application," he answered. "And there's quite a waiting list. Preference is supposed to be given to people living under the worst conditions. But first any family would have to make application in the right way. Have your people applied?"

"I don't know," Dorinda admitted. "I'll find out."

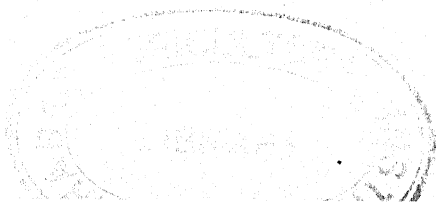
But first she had to talk to Mrs. Olsen.

* * *

She had had her own reasons for asking to be the one to call on Mrs. Olsen. But she almost forgot them in her interest as they went along the great square bank of apartments a few days later, looking for the right number.

"I've been here before, but the houses look so much alike," said Mary Ann. "That is, most of them look alike. But once you catch sight of Mrs. Olsen's, you'll recognize it. There it is! See what I mean!" she finished triumphantly as they turned the corner.

The Olsen house was approached by the same cement steps and miniature piazza as the others. But before it, instead of a patch of tramped and dusty lawn scattered with drifting papers, there was a tiny garden, which even at this season showed the results of care and had a certain charm. The flower beds were squared off carefully, the baby evergreens were thrifty and well trimmed, and the pruned stalks of perennials made a pattern in the cleared earth.



Mrs. Olsen welcomed them into her living room with placid friendliness. Her round face was rosy, her fair braids shone, her housedress was freshly ironed. The living room was like her, clean and very attractive. The sunlight streamed through the large steel-framed windows.

"Sit right down and have some cookies with me!" she invited. "I was just longing for a bit of rest. You came Thursday on purpose, didn't you?"

"The teachers are holding a meeting. We have a holiday," said Mary Ann, puzzled.

"Oh, then I'm just lucky," chuckled Mrs. Olsen. "Any other day I'd have been at work at my job. I work for Mrs. Adams, up on Fern Street."

Mary Ann explained the reason for their visit, and they found Mrs. Olsen very sympathetic, as they had expected.

"I'll be glad to try to get some of the neighbors interested in the church," she said. "Why shouldn't I? It's meant a lot to me. And I do think a building of our own would be just grand. Of course, at first lots of things seemed sort of funny. But I'm used to it now, and I like it fine. I never could get Ernest interested in the church downtown, and I'm frank to say it seemed a long way to go, even for me."

"Well, we do appreciate —" said Mary Ann, after a suitable amount of small talk had led them from the point of their visit.

But Dorinda leaned forward. "We are so worried

about one thing. About two, really. That gang of boys. And then the people from Swampy Point. It seems as if they need the church so much, but just lately — have you noticed — they seem to have dropped out entirely? Some of them won't even talk to Mr. Scott when he goes down to call."

Mrs. Olsen shook her head and rocked in troubled silence. "I was afraid of it," she said. "I think it's because Ernest and I go to the church that the Carnarvons don't come, and they always lead the others."

Dorinda gasped, "But — but why —"

"You see, we were once Swampy Pointers, too," said Mrs. Olsen slowly, as if it were hard for her to say it. "Yes, we were down on our luck when the Mister was killed in a building accident. We couldn't find a place to rent for what we could pay. So we stayed there for a year. We were good friends with the Carnarvons. They're respectable folks, but coming from the hills, it's harder for them to make out, and then besides, there are all those kids. Ernest and Freddy were real good friends — like David and Jonathan, I thought. But when we moved out and Freddy had to stay in Swampy Point, why he turned against us. Whole family took his part. Then soon enough he went bad with those Brown boys. Now he's a case."

"But Mrs. Olsen, the Carnarvons came at first," protested Dorinda. She remembered seeing Mrs. Olsen, Ernest, and Portia going in the first day, and how Portia had drawn away from the others.

"I know. I know. I was real glad and hoped they'd make it up with us again. But I have no doubt Freddy was too much for them in the end."

The visitors found it was too late for another call and walked back to the bus stop in silence.

"Wasn't that something?" said Mary Ann finally. "You'd never dream Mrs. Olsen could ever have lived down in that awful dump —"

"It's not a dump!" cried Dorinda indignantly. Then she laughed wryly. "That's the way I felt, too. But no place where fine people live is a dump, and if you could get acquainted with Missy — Oh, I'm all mixed up. I don't even know what to say."

But she did know what to *do*, though it took her a while to admit it to herself. Even if it were wrong to hide it from her mother, even if Mr. Scott had advised her not to go, she just had to see Portia again and find out what was wrong.

She didn't believe it was just because Mrs. Olsen and Ernest attended church that Portia had stopped coming so abruptly. Something must have happened, or someone had said something.

So the first day she could manage it, she found herself marching from the bus stop across the tracks toward the river. Marching was the word, marching to battle or some kind of doom, she felt. The day was chilly and bleak. Across the steel-gray river the hills were like a pen-and-ink sketch with no color. Half a dozen coal barges moved slowly down the river ahead of their small, dirty tug, and

the smell of river weeds and dead fish lay heavy over the soaked ground.

As Dorinda turned up the street, a group of children who had been playing in the puddles gave a few sharp cries and disappeared behind the houses. The puddles were still moving when she walked past, each ragged, muddy pool ringed with a widening circle as perfect as that in any lake. One of the children had left a little battered red boat behind.

The shack of the Sage was closed and still, but a feather of smoke drifted from the chimney.

"They wouldn't *hurt* me," Dorinda reassured herself as she walked with pounding heart across the splintery plank that led over the mud to the Carnarvons' front door. Her sharp knock sounded so loud that she looked around uneasily to see if it had attracted attention.

Of course they wouldn't hurt her (though she recalled inopportunely the raid of the gang of boys), but it wasn't very nice to knock where you were not welcome.

The door opened suddenly, as if someone had been waiting there for her to knock, and Freddy stood above her. She wondered why she had ever thought he looked like Portia.

"What do *you* want?" asked Freddy grimly.

Why had she come? "I want to see Portia," Dorinda said faintly.

"Portia don't want to see you," said Freddy.

"Then — then I'd like to see Missy," said Dorinda. She couldn't imagine Missy's being angry or unkind.

But to her astonishment, this request fired Freddy to white fury.

"Missy! How can you even speak of her! You know she's gone!"

"She's gone?" gasped Dorinda. "But where?" Could Missy have died?

Freddy stared at her blankly, the anger fading from his face. "But you must have knowed," he said. He turned back into the room. "Portia, didn't you say it was this girl's Ma?"

Portia came to the door and looked stonily at Dorinda. "Sure it was her Ma," she said. "Come and took her, with the Board of Health to prove we had no rights at all. What makes you act as if you didn't know?"

Dorinda backed away, appalled. "I didn't know. Mother d-didn't say," she stuttered. How could Mother have done that! She must find out. She must find out right away.

Without another word, Dorinda turned back. She ran down the road, splashing straight through a puddle before she noticed it and scarcely feeling her wet shoes.

She didn't realize that Portia was calling uncertainly after her, "Dory! Come back! Come back here!"



CHAPTER EIGHT

Mother!" called Dorinda, bursting open the front door and slamming it shut behind her. "Mother, are you at home?"

A small electric humming somewhere ceased, and the house waited a moment in astonished silence.

"Of course!" said Mother's voice from the sunroom. "What on earth is the matter?"

Dorinda sped into the sunroom. She stood in the doorway with her hands on her hips, her face blazing.

"What do you mean, 'of course'?" she demanded. "You're hardly ever at home! You're nearly always away from home, minding someone else's business! You're not a mother at all. You're just a collection of organizations! Why did you take Missy away? You've hurt them all terribly and almost spoiled the new church, too!"

Mrs. Poole braced her hands flat on the sewing table. The color was gone from her face. "What do you — what — what are you talking about, Dorinda?"

"I'm talking about lots of things," said Dorinda bitterly. "But most of them don't really matter, I guess. What matters is Missy — Missy Carnarvon. Why did you go and take her away like that?"

Mrs. Poole's face cleared and resumed its sensible, pleasant expression. "Oh, Missy; why, she's at the sanitarium and will soon be getting well," she said. "What's so terrible about that?"

"But, Mother, you didn't do it right!" Dorinda wailed. "You just took her and nearly broke the family's heart."

"It was a matter of life and death," said Mrs. Poole warmly. "You can't be sentimental in such a situation. The family will be grateful when she comes back cured."

Dorinda shook her head stubbornly. "It made them feel like — like things, instead of people," she said. "And they think I told you to do it. We were going to do the same thing, Mr. Scott and I — but we understand the Carnarvons. They're our friends, or they were, and we could have done it without hurting them so."

Mrs. Poole looked at her daughter's face. In spite of her shock, she looked carefully and with interest. The aloof, indifferent face was alive now, and the large brown eyes had lost their expression of reserve and uncertainty and were lighted with excitement and indignation.

"How did you find out about all this, Dorinda?" her mother asked quietly.

Dorinda's look swerved a minute, then came back.

"I disobeyed you," she said. "It's the second time. You told me not to go to Swampy Point without Mr. Scott, but Portia and Missy are my friends, and I had to go because they needed me. But Portia hates me now because of what you did. And Freddy — oh, we'll never be able to do anything for Freddy's gang now."

"Tell me about Freddy and Portia — they're the brother and sister, I suppose? Portia is the fine-looking girl who was so angry with me. But I haven't seen Freddy."

"Freddy is the leader of that gang of boys, the Swampy Point gang," said Dorinda. "But, oh, it isn't really his fault. Imagine how a person would feel . . ."

Dorinda launched breathlessly into the story of the Carnarvons. She told it with more passion than clarity and punctuated it with accusing glances. She told a little about the Sedgewicks and Barnhardts, but conscientiously deleted the box traps.

"It's too bad you didn't tell me before," said her mother quietly when she had stopped.

"I meant to tell you all about it that very night," Dorinda murmured, and then her anger rose again. "But you never seemed interested in what I was doing! And that night — Bart —" She had to stop there, but her mother, with narrowed eyes, was remembering.

"And that very night I was worrying about the Carnarvons," she said. "It was one of several cases we'd been going over, but it was the most urgent one. I was trying to figure out some good approach."

She shook her head sardonically, and Dorinda smiled back, unwillingly and wryly. Then she happened to notice what her mother had been sewing on the machine. It was a new taffeta dress for her, in soft green, with black velvet bows. "Oh, Mother!" sobbed Dorinda. No matter how busy Mother was, she always found time to do nice things like this.

Her mother, tears in her own eyes, held Dorinda close and patted her back.

"I thought you were grown-up. I thought you didn't need me any more," she said.

Dorinda stiffened a little. "I'm growing up. I don't need you like a little girl," she said. "I — I just want to be friends with you."

They remained in silence for a while. Mrs. Poole's eyes dried and grew bright again. "Now that I know the Carnarvons' situation so much better — from the inside," she said, "there's so much more we can do for them."

"If they ever forgive us," said Dorinda. Then her

face lighted. "But with you to help, there's so much more *we* can do! Mr. Scott's trying to get better jobs for Mr. Barnhardt and Mr. Sedgewick — you would know lots more people than Mr. Scott knows yet. And then there's the Rocco baby — somehow we must get acquainted with those other families even if the Sage thinks they're hopeless."

"The Sage? What do you mean?"

"Promise you won't try to change his life?" said Dorinda suspiciously.

"That serves me right, I suppose, but really, social workers, volunteer or professional, aren't so heartless, or so interfering, either," answered her mother soberly.

"Well, maybe the church isn't quite so useless as you thought, either!" said Dorinda. "Well, the Sage . . ."

They were still talking when Dad came in, and they looked at him blankly.

"Dinner!" cried Mother in dismay. They both jumped up and rushed into the kitchen.

"What's this all about? What has disrupted my household like this?" asked Dad, following them curiously.

"Hush, Tom, don't bother us. We'll tell you at dinner. Dory, get some onions from the cellar, will you?"

Bart came in a few minutes later, and he and Dad prowled around the kitchen like lions, as curious as they were hungry.

"Those girls must be nuts," said Bart.

"They're up to something," asserted Dad.

The whole story came out at dinner.

"Well, Tom," she said, "I think I'm about to be converted. Has the church been as lively as this all the time, and I didn't notice?"

She went on in her amusing way. But Dorinda didn't mind the humor. Mother was always poking fun at herself, but usually, and especially this time, there was plenty of understanding underneath the joking.

"What's their name?" asked Dad. He got his little notebook out of his pocket. "I'll get to work on that housing problem."

"Oh, Dad!" cried Dorinda thankfully.

"Seems as if a ball team might appeal to those Dead End kids of yours," suggested Bart.

"Oh, we've tried that," said Dorinda. "But it doesn't seem to go over with them. But Bart, maybe if you —"

"Oh, gosh," said Bart. "I didn't mean to stick out my neck. You know I haven't got time."

"Well, anyway, having a decent place to live ought to make a difference to Freddy," Dorinda said hopefully.

"I told Mrs. Carnarvon she could visit the sanitarium," said Mrs. Poole. "But she may not have understood; she was so distressed, and it would be hard for her to get out there, too. I'll see tomorrow that she gets a chance."

Dorinda could hardly wait to get home from school the next day. She was overjoyed when she learned that Mrs. Carnarvon had visited the sanitarium and that her suspicion and fear had all melted away when she saw how comfortable and happy Missy was. Dorinda rushed to phone the good news to Mary Ann.

But on Sunday, Portia was not back in the choir. Dorinda was troubled, then she caught sight of her in the congregation — and beside her was Mrs. Carnarvon — and beside Mrs. Carnarvon, Mrs. Olsen!

"It was downright good of you," said Portia, marching forward to shake her hand when the service was over. "After I gave you the rough side of my tongue like I did, too. I should have known you wouldn't turn Missy in after I told you how Mom felt. But still and all, I guess it's real lucky your Ma went right ahead."

"I was wrong," said Mrs. Carnarvon. "It's easy to see that now. Sometimes a body don't recognize her real friends."

Mary Ann and Susan were lingering hopefully near, so Dorinda called them over for introductions.

"We're so glad about Missy," said Mary Ann. "We feel as if we know her; Dory's talked about her so much."

"Polly's in my group, and is she a honey!" chirped Susan. "But say, where were the Sedgewicks and the Barnhardts today? They stopped coming when —" She was overtaken midsentence with the realization that she was not being tactful.

"Oh, they weren't up in time this morning," Portia said dryly. "Novelty's wore off, you know, and they're out of the habit. It'll be like pulling teeth to get them out from now on."

"Just like most of the folks at First," said Susan.

* * *

"Well, how is your institution coming along?" Mr.

Poole asked Dorinda at dinner several days later. "What is the latest exploit of the power behind the pulpit? Meaning you, of course."

Dorinda giggled. "Mrs. Hornby came down Saturday morning," she said. "She got so interested in the boys' crafts class that she was practically sawing wood herself. She wants to get them some more tools."

"Why, you'd have thought she'd take more of an interest in the sewing," Dad remarked.

"Too tame for her! She may look like a China shepherdess, but she's more of a tomboy," said Dorinda. She turned to her mother reproachfully. "Why didn't you tell me about all those foreign students she's adopted!"

"I had sort of forgotten it myself," admitted her mother. "Besides, you wouldn't have listened. Well, I hope her interest will convert her husband."

"Is he still a die-hard?" asked Dad.

Dorinda and her mother looked at each other.

"We just don't know," said Mrs. Poole. "Our survey is going pretty well. But we're facing that slump that comes inevitably after the first shiny enthusiasm is worn off; and the program is so handicapped by lack of facilities. Then there's the gang of boys. And we have no possible building in view to present to the church as a possibility."

"What about the tavern just across the street?" inquired Bart. "Couldn't you convert that?"

"You mean Club 98?" asked Dorinda, feeling her face flush. Mother and Dad were looking from one to the other and wondering, but Bart only passed his hand

lightly over his smooth, dark hair and answered easily, "Yeah, I guess that's what they call it. I happen to know it's been losing money and they're thinking of selling out."

The silence was dense for a moment. "How do you, Bart Poole, happen to have inside information about the business affairs of a tavern on Lowestoft Street?" inquired Dad ominously.

Bart took a deep breath. "Oh, it belongs to Mr. Korte. He's the guy our band works for."

He looked from one to the other of his parents, measuring them, like a fighter on his toes before a battle.

Dorinda held her breath. "Well, it's out in the open at last," she thought, "I wonder if he did that on purpose." It was a relief in a way and so much more like Bart to be frank and challenging.

"Do you think Mr. Korte is a suitable person for a group of high school children to be involved with?" asked Dad with his soft, warning lawyer's manner.

"Children, oh, dear," thought Dorinda.

"We're professionals," said Bart coolly. "He treats us fairly. We've been working for him for months, and you never said a word before."

"I was relying on your good judgment," said Dad heavily.

"Well, why don't you keep on, then?" asked Bart. He passed his hand over his hair again. It was the only sign that he was in the least upset. "It's just business with us. We're making money. Not many high school kids have

as much saved up as I have, and I'm getting a lot of experience, too. There's no other way to earn so much and still have time to get on the honor roll and go out for sports." His head was high and he was still half smiling.

"And you've been playing in these taverns and gambling joints where half the crime and misery in the city originates?" Mother asked breathlessly. "Oh, Son!"

"I don't do any gambling, you can be sure of that," said Bart. "But we've strayed from the subject. If you want a building for your church, why don't you get in touch with my boss Mr. Korte?"

He was so cool that he took their breaths away, and while they were still silent he went out of the room.

"What shall we do?" Mother cried. "Tom, don't just sit there!"

"We'll see that the whole thing stops," said Dad. "Great heaven, why didn't I get to the bottom of this months ago?"

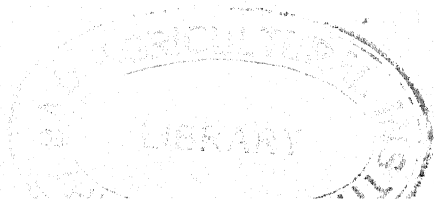
Dorinda went away, knowing they needed to talk alone, and her heart ached both for them and for Bart. She was frightened about Bart. He seemed so knowing, so terribly faraway and untouchable.

But even as she was standing in her room thinking about him, Bart came up behind her.

"Folks still down there considering the verdict?" he grinned. "I thought so. Dory — if you really want that building, and I think it would be a fairly decent place if you fixed it over a bit — have the preacher, or whoever it should be, tackle Mrs. Korte first. She's got good ideas

— she's a real lady, even if she is married to a sort of a heel. I think she'd like to see something good come of that crumby old place. Here's her number."

He gave her a slip of paper and a light pat on the shoulder and was gone, whistling, down the stairs and out the front door. Where he was going nobody knew.





CHAPTER NINE

*P*ortia! Johnny! Mary Ann! Mr. Scott!" shouted Dorinda as she rushed up the stairs to the school auditorium on Saturday morning.

The people she named and others were sitting around listlessly. Brooms and mops waited. Sewing tables, work benches, and basketballs were alike deserted.

"Well, you little ball of fire, why so gay?" demanded Johnny. "This is our last Saturday morning of life, as you might say. I don't get it."

Dorinda surveyed them all, containing her news with a false demureness. "What! Ten o'clock and no basketball game started yet? No woodwork? No sewing?"

Johnny glowered at her. "You know we haven't been having enough guys for a game. Only three showed up today, so they went home."

"We finished our bookends last time, and there wasn't time to start anything else," said Danny. "All we did was pack up the tools. I suppose they'll have to go back in that closet down at the church where everything else is stuffed away."

"We finished our aprons last time, too," said Portia, smoothing hers affectionately. It was red and white, the gay print from a feed bag, made in a smart style and trimmed with red rickrack.

"Never mind aprons, never mind bookends, never mind basketball," said Dorinda breathlessly, while they all stared at her. "Mr. Scott, I've got some news."

"Well, speak up," Mr. Scott burst out. "Why are you keeping us waiting?"

"You know that tavern across the street?" said Dorinda, her lips curling impishly. "Club 98?" Mr. Scott was really aggravated!

"Tavern?" repeated Mary Ann. "Is it one of those murky-looking places in the block of stores?"

"Yes, the murkiest," said Mr. Scott. "A two-story building with a poolroom or something in back. Quite a good-sized place, I imagine."

"That's where Freddy's gang hangs out," said Johnny.

"I've seen them slinking around there plenty of times."

"Well," said Dorinda, "that's the place, the place for our new church. A man named Korte owns it, and he's selling out."

Mr. Scott was erect and vibrant with attention. "It's a good building; brick and cement construction," he said. "But, of course, they'd want too much."

"Maybe not," said Dorinda. "My — my brother knows these people, and he says, Bart says, Mrs. Korte's quite different from her husband. He thinks — in fact, he's talked with her — she would like to have the place used for a church. She told him she would get her husband to make us a very good price."

"Woman!" cried Mr. Scott. "What are we waiting for? What's her phone number? This is the dawn!"

Dorinda took out a slip of paper from her pocketbook. "Bart wrote down the number for us. Here."

Mr. Scott glanced at it and then back at Dorinda. "Bart took a good bit of trouble. Why didn't he come and tell us about it himself?" he asked.

Dorinda looked surprised. "Why — he's always so busy," she said. "You know — he's not too much interested."

"He acts a little interested," observed Mr. Scott. "Well, so long, kids. Wish me luck."

"He's a wonderful guy," said Johnny, as Mr. Scott hurried off. "Sure is human. Pity he isn't a little better basketball coach."

"You can't quite expect one person to do the job of

a coach and a preacher and a social service worker and a public relations man equally well," Dorinda defended.

"Well, come on, Dory, tell us more about this tavern deal!" said Susan.

"I really don't know any more," said Dorinda, but she told her story all over again, and they speculated endlessly on each point.

"Let's go case the joint," said Johnny. "Decide how to fix it up!"

"First we ought to do our work here," Mary Ann said firmly. "Here, John, take this implement."

Johnny accepted the broom with a grimace. "I can sure sweep a lot better than I used to could," he asserted gloomily.

They had started their lunch before Mr. Scott returned. He came fairly leaping up the stairs.

"Well," he said, as they all suspended bites to hear his news, "I'd like a portrait of you all. You look like a row of fish. I'm going to rest before I tell you, so close your mouths."

"Oh, don't be so mean! You're worse than Dory," squealed Susan.

But Danny said shrewdly, "I think it's good news, or he wouldn't be keeping us in suspenders."

Mr. Scott laughed. "Well, so it is, Danny. I went out to see Mrs. Korte. She mentioned a very reasonable figure, with good terms. Only one catch to it. If we don't take it up quick, her husband will go ahead and offer it on public sale. Then we wouldn't stand a chance."

"When's the deadline?" asked Johnny.

"The deadline's next Thursday. So we'd have to have a church meeting at least by Wednesday evening. We could just about get it advertised properly by then."

"But Wednesday," said Portia, "is the night the members of Friendship Church are giving the reception for First!"

They all looked at her. "Of course, we could change it," she said.

"Oh, no; you needn't change it," said Mr. Scott. "We'll call the business meeting after the reception. What better time could there be?"

"Swell!" cried Johnny. "We'll get them all broken-down and good-natured at the party, and then — whammo! Say, let's go look at our future church building!"

"Hold on, hold on," said Mr. Scott soberly. "Remember, we don't have it yet. There's many a vote to be cast, and we haven't any exactly spectacular results to report."

Dorinda was alternately way up and way down during the next few days. By Wednesday evening she was half frantic with excitement.

"I hope the new people will turn in a good account of themselves at this party," said Mother. "What are they going to do for entertainment?"

"I don't know. Portia won't tell me," said Dorinda. "Oh, dear. Say, Mother, couldn't we take our azalea down to help decorate? It's in such lovely bloom right

now. Bart, you'd drive me over with it, wouldn't you?"

"I've got a rehearsal tonight," said Bart. "I'd have to get back early."

His parents glanced at him and then quickly away again. They were all on very formal terms, so that Dorinda deduced nothing had been settled about the orchestra. It seemed strange that her parents should be so helpless.

"Oh, we'd be back by seven-thirty," Dorinda assured him.

So Bart visited Friendship Church that evening for the first time.

"I played basketball down here when I was a kid in grade school," he mused, as they went in at the lighted doorway. "Looks sort of familiar."

"Looks familiar to me, too," acknowledged Dorinda with an affectionate and wistful glance around the empty halls, noting the drinking fountains and the pictures on the walls. "But it usually doesn't sound like — My, they're making a lot of noise getting ready for the party!"

She and Bart climbed stairs thoughtfully for a minute or two, listening to the banging and shouting above. Then they turned to look at each other in bewilderment.

"Good grief, that isn't just people cleaning up — that's an earthquake or something!" said Bart. "What in the world —!"

"Maybe we should go and get somebody else," quavered Dorinda. "Maybe we should phone!"

But Bart was springing lightly up the stairs on the

balls of his feet. He made a shoving gesture back over his shoulder to Dorinda, but she kept right on after him. She was frightened, but she certainly didn't mean to be left behind.

Now the sound of angry voices and crashing furniture was quite plain. The door of the little kitchen was open, and the whole room came gradually into view, but for a minute Dorinda saw it without understanding, as a person sees when suddenly awakened, without being able to interpret what she sees.

There were boys pulling down the ribbon-tied greens from the wall and other boys fighting; there were boys slamming together the folding chairs and throwing them down on the floor. There were several girls jumping up and down and shrieking. At last Dorinda saw one face clearly from across the room. It was Portia's, and she wasn't screaming but was looking on with excitement, and almost — this shocked Dorinda to her senses — a kind of joy.

Then Dorinda realized that it was Freddy's gang again, trying to sabotage the party. Just a moment later one of the boys caught sight of Bart.

"Scram, youse guys!" he shouted shrilly. Scarcely looking around, with the economy in flight of the accustomed fugitive, the boys abandoned battle and destruction and in a moment had disappeared. Only the wreckage remained, and the defenders looking around in a dazed sort of way.

"Freddy!" shouted Dorinda. "Freddy!"

Freddy turned and grinned. His eye was almost swollen shut and his sleeve was torn from shoulder to cuff, but to Dorinda he looked beautiful, and she looked past him with happy understanding to Portia's smiling face.

"Freddy tipped us off," said Ernest, testing his aching muscles and looking around ruefully. "We just had time to get over here. We needed a few more guys on our side, though."

"You were doing all right," said Bart. "They had the odds on you, but you kept them interested." He began to set up the chairs again.

"Say, we don't have much time to clean up this place," said Portia, looking up with alarm at the big old wall clock. "Seven o'clock already."

They all went to work without more conversation — Portia and the other girls, Ernest and the boys, setting up chairs and retying the red bows on the branches of evergreen. The strangeness of the situation was forgotten in its urgency.

"I can't get over you guys," Bart said, as he handed garlands up to Freddy for rehanging. "You were sure giving it to them. Such teamwork!"

Freddy and Ernest glanced at each other sheepishly. "We've been in many a rumpus together before," said Freddy.

"That cooperation would go well on a basketball team," said Bart.

"Sa-ay!" Ernest stopped with the broom in his hands. "You're *that* Bart Poole! The basketball guy."

"Oh, my, I never introduced you," said Dory. "Well, I guess you know each other by now. Give that bow up there a kind of shake, will you, Freddy?"

"I wonder what makes fellows act like those guys did tonight?" Bart mused. "Tearing up other people's things like a lot of little kids, when there're so many other things to do."

Freddy stepped off the chair and picked up another branch. "Such as?" he asked grimly.

"Well, take basketball," said Bart.

"Take it from where?" asked Freddy. "Most of them guys don't go to high school no more — got kicked out or flunked out. They got no basketball. Nothing else to do between jobs but pool and — such as tonight."

"Didn't I hear there was basketball practice here every Saturday morning?" Bart asked sharply.

"Some kind of setup for little kids," said Freddy. "Besides, we — I don't want no handouts."

"I don't know about that," said Bart. "But I do know everybody gets a handout somewhere. If they can, your folks give it to you — or schools, or churches — what's the diff? What counts is what you do with what you get."

"Hey, Freddy," Ernie interrupted nervously, "I hear somebody coming. We'd better get out of here and get cleaned up, or everyone will know something happened tonight. If the First Church folks hear about this ruckus, it won't help the vote any."

"Hurry back," Dorinda urged. She surveyed the room anxiously. Surely anybody could tell something

awful had happened just from looking at those horrible bows Freddy had tied.

"Bart — " she began, and then broke off, realizing with a sense of shock and disappointment that Bart was no longer standing with her. She hadn't seen him go out, but he was gone. Of course, he had that rehearsal tonight. She remembered that.

But he had seemed so interested and had worked hard. Without really thinking about it she had assumed he was part of the crowd tonight and would stay. And now he had gone without even saying good-by.



CHAPTER TEN

The first people to arrive were the Sedgewicks and Mrs. Olsen. Mrs. Olsen had the refreshments in boxes under her chubby arms, and she began at once to unload and arrange the food, pausing only to wave from the kitchen doorway. Mr. Sedgewick was in charge of entertainment. It was the first time Mrs. Sedgewick had come out to anything, and she looked a little scared.

"Well, how are you, young lady? Glad to see you!" Mr. Sedgewick said to Dorinda, pumping her hand.

"Won't you have a seat over here till the party rightly begins?"

Dorinda suddenly remembered that she was a guest at this party and hastily tried to look like one. She did not have a chance to forget it again. Every member of Friendship Church seemed to be a welcoming committee of one.

Many of the First Church people came, partly because of the important meeting afterward. The hosts were outnumbered two to one, but nobody was neglected. The Sedgewicks, Portia, Mrs. Olsen, and several others kept on greeting and introducing people till the arrivals were concluded. Then the party began. It was different from any party Dorinda had attended.

First there was a Bible game. It was a little embarrassing. The First Church people hadn't brought their Bibles with them; but their hosts made haste to share their supply. By looking on three and four together, they were all able to play the game. It was also a little embarrassing because the guests weren't better informed, but everyone laughed and joked when, for instance, Mrs. Jordan became confused about Potiphar and called him "she," and when Mr. Sedgewick stumped Mr. Scott by asking him where Apollonia's name occurred in the Scriptures, the whole room roared.

Then there was the singing. Dorinda glanced cautiously at her First Church acquaintances as the rollicking choruses and gospel songs rolled through the room. She had never heard this type of music at First Church

but it was infectious. Soon she was singing, too — everyone was singing. They couldn't help it.

But it was such a different kind of party — what would it do to the First Church vote?

Refreshments were a surprise, too. There was so much food. First there were sandwiches that must have taken the women hours to make, and then, when the guests thought they had finished, Mrs. Olsen brought out plates and plates of cake, chocolate cake with fudge icing, seven-minute icing, and coconut icing, white cake, and spice cake.

"We are overwhelmed," said Mr. Scott, when he rose on behalf of the guests at about ten-thirty. A sign of laughter and agreement, of tired muscles and full stomachs, confirmed him. "We do thank Friendship Church and assure you it's one of the best parties we ever attended!

"And now, if you'll excuse us, we must call a business meeting. We'll gather at the north end of the room, and any of you who are interested are invited to join us."

Johnny and the other boys began to set chairs in rows for the meeting, and as the easy circle was jerked into stern rows, the whole atmosphere of the room began to change. Dorinda wondered why a business meeting had to be jinxed by such a grim arrangement! She must remember to ask Mr. Scott.

Dorinda helped Portia scrape and pile dishes until the meeting got started. Then she slipped into the seat in the back row between her father and mother.

"Look at Mr. Hornby," whispered Mrs. Poole.

Mr. Hornby, who had laughed and sung and eaten and had had a good time all evening, was now referring to a thick sheaf of papers as he sat in the front row and waited for Mr. Scott to introduce him. Mrs. Hornby, who sat next to him, kept whispering urgently to him, but he hardly seemed to notice her.

Even Mr. Scott's easy, confident manner was a little changed, a little watchful. He glanced at Dr. Harpeman who had asked him to preside.

"You all know the purpose of this meeting," said Mr. Scott. "The present quarters of Friendship Church have become inadequate, and we have a good chance to get the building across the street. We've got to act promptly. Mr. Gulbranson will give you business details, but first we must hear the report of our Committee on Continuing. Mr. Hornby."

Mr. Hornby got up and cleared his throat. Dorinda thought he might just as well sit down again immediately. As far as she was concerned his report was made. It was negative. He was against everything.

But he didn't sit down. He didn't even get to the subject for a long time, first approaching it ominously from all sides. Economically, it was the wrong time for expanding. Where would they get the money? Sociologically, the experiment was dubious. How could they handle the juvenile delinquency, the housing problems, the health problems? In point of time, it was expensive. The assistant pastor, he understood, had done hardly

anything for the past three months except work on Friendship Church. Mr. Hornby closed up his notes.

His grim face relaxed. "But I don't mind telling you that I was almost convinced by this evening's fine performance!" he said. Mr. Hornby beamed. "I haven't seen such a rousing church party in years."

He became stern again. "However, we must hew to the facts. The facts are these." Out came the notes again. "Since our last business meeting, attendance at all functions of Friendship Church except the Saturday morning crafts classes has dropped about 10 per cent. No progress has been made with the group of delinquent boys.

"It is true that our opinion poll among the people affected was favorable, but still, their contributions and support declined. I can only ask you, are we justified in launching out? For myself, I can only answer no."

As soon as he had sat down, Mrs. Poole jumped up.

"I do agree with what you said about the party, Mr. Hornby!" she cried. "I feel exactly the same. Friendship Church is alive; are we going to kill it? There has been a slight drop in the last few weeks, but with a new building and all our enthusiasm behind the activities, we can turn those figures upside down in a hurry."

Mr. Hornby rose and bowed very ceremoniously to Mrs. Poole. "I am always so glad to have Mrs. Poole agree with me," he said dryly. "Pray forgive me if I can't always agree with her. I think it should, in fairness, be mentioned that another case of vandalism occurred in this room this very evening."

Mr. Gulbranson's report, which followed, fell into a rather blank stillness, and Dorinda became discouraged just listening to it. It was so long, so involved, and the amounts of money required seemed so impossibly large. The national home mission board would help but only if certain conditions could be met. She looked around the listening faces. The glow of the party seemed to her quite faded away.

Then she saw Freddy come in. Freddy spoke to Portia, who had been standing quietly against the wall and had been frowning and folding her apron strings over and over again. Portia was startled but she went quietly over and whispered something to Mr. Scott.

Mr. Scott got up, looking queer. He was frowning. He looked uncertain and troubled.

"Before we take a vote or hear more discussion, I'd like to present another speaker," said Mr. Scott. He rubbed his head, hesitated. "I don't know what he wants to say. His name — I don't know his name, I'm afraid. He's known as the Sage of Swampy Point."

The numbness that had followed Mr. Gulbranson's report melted away. The mere sound of the name of the Sage was as dramatic as a roll of drums. He entered, taking full advantage of his setting.

He walked in slowly and stiffly, and tonight his beard seemed even longer, his air even more majestic, his clothes even more mildewed, and his expression even more that of a malicious Santa Claus.

"May I speak?" asked the Sage (quite unnecessarily,

as everyone was waiting with bated breath). His voice, as Dory remembered, was a little rusty, but deep and commanding. "I have something to say. My young friend, Freddy Carnarvon, has told me of this meeting and its significance. You are deciding the fate of an infant church. You may be deciding also the course of many lives."

He paused and looked around, thoroughly enjoying the stunned appearance of his audience.

"I was against you at first. I have seen too much of the superficial interest of the comfortable in their disinherited brothers. I have seen smugness, callousness, and self-love. I am an exile because of my revolt from these things."

He seemed to look up and down each row of people, into each face, and his shaggy brows frowned.

"I see them even here. I see the fat busybody whose interest is all in the shortcomings of others, and the thin miser who hasn't a penny or a good word for anybody. I see the complacent fool and the calculating rogue. You're no different."

The room was perfectly still except for one indignant snort from Mrs. Jordan. Mr. Scott had his foot on a chair and was fingering his chin with an expression of mingled delight and apprehension.

"But lately," the Sage resumed more quietly, "I have seen a miracle or two. I have seen a mother who was slipping away from reality in her fear and despondency saved for her family by her little boy's Sunday school

teacher. I have seen a preacher — a preacher, mind you! — help some men to get better jobs so that they could live again on the firm ground inside the law. I have seen a girl's life saved, and dreams relit in a boy's eyes, and people promised homes of comfort and safety.

"These miracles weren't wrought by saints, either, but by you people — you sinners! Maybe you can bring some more miracles to pass, and I think you ought to give yourselves a chance.

"So I say, I, the Sage, as they call me, the Lonely Lover of Men that I am — I say: Build your church! You will do well."

Without waiting for his entranced audience to stir, in the full potency of his spell, the Sage stumped out slowly.

As movement and power returned to him, Mr. Hornby sprang up again.

"I can't say what this madman is after," he fussed, "but I suggest we overlook his intrusion and get back to the business in hand."

"No!" shouted a dozen voices, and the room was in an uproar.

Mr. Scott and Dr. Harpeman conferred. Mr. Scott got up.

"Are we ready for the question?" he asked.

"Question!" roared the audience.

"We'll vote by ballot. Will the tellers distribute paper and pencils?" asked Mr. Scott.

The passing of the ballots, the creaking of chairs and rattling of paper as they were marked, and the tramp

of the tellers going out to count the votes, made it all seem tense and dramatic.

"And I thought church meetings were dull!" somebody hissed in Dorinda's ear.

She turned in astonishment to see Bart behind her.

"I — I thought you'd gone," she stammered.

"Well, I had to go," Bart agreed. "The orchestra expected me. But there was nothing to keep me from coming back. Nothing could have. I was lucky to arrive in time for the climax."

The tellers returned. Their beaming faces made a clear announcement before they put it into words.

"Forty in favor of buying the building for Friendship Church, seven against!"

The meeting broke up in excitement and happiness. Mr. Scott came over to Dorinda and Bart with hand stretched out.

"And this is Dorinda Poole's brother?" he asked.

"You've never met before?" Dory asked in surprise.

"Not quite," said Bart. "But say, Mr. Scott, do you think you could use an assistant basketball coach on Saturday mornings?"

"But — I thought you had practice for your orchestra Saturday mornings!" Dory exclaimed.

"Not any more," said Bart. "I've decided to go amateur for a while. What about it, Mr. Scott?"

"I'd like nothing better!" said Mr. Scott. "Say, with you in there coaching we should be able to work a few more of those miracles the old man told us about."

THE THIRD WISH

Dory and her family were silent as they drove home. But it was a pleasant silence. Dorinda hugged the azalea and smiled to herself.

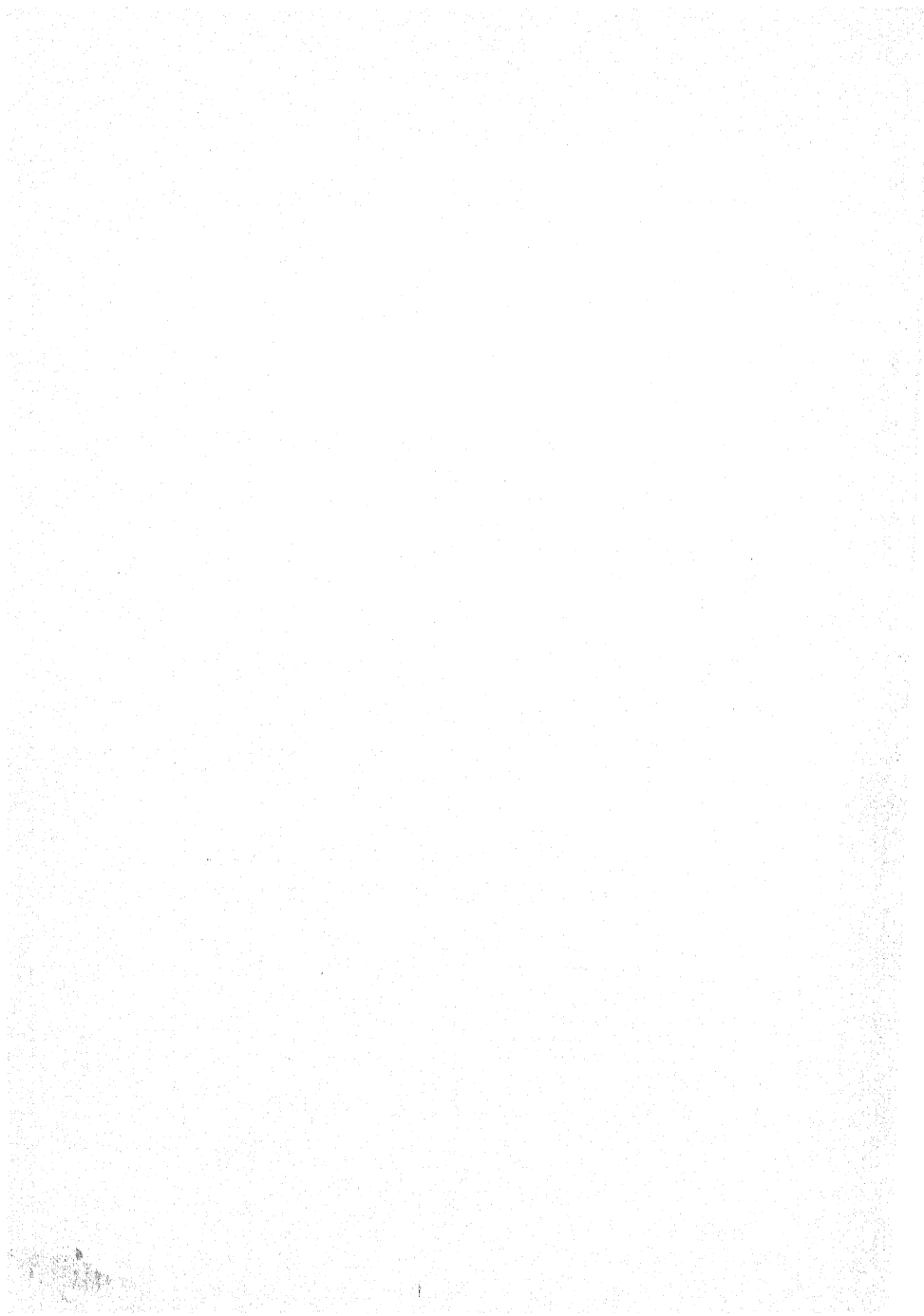
When they had driven into the garage, Mother said, "Let's build a fire in the fireplace. I know it's terribly late, but we have so much to talk over together!"

"I'll bring in the wood," offered Bart. "And Mom, are there any of those chocolate chip cookies left?"

"There's ginger ale in the refrigerator," said Dad.

"I've got my third wish!" thought Dorinda.





ABOUT THE ARTIST

KATHLEEN VOUTE was born in Montclair, New Jersey. After graduation from the Montclair High School, she studied art in what is now the Ballard School in New York City. Following this she took advanced work with the Art Student's League and at the Grand Central School of Art. Later she took up the study of water colors with George Pearce Ennis. At present her studio is in her own home in Montclair.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The text in this book is set in Monotype Baskerville No. 353, a facsimile of the type created by John Baskerville in England about 1757. The book was composed, printed and bound in paper by The Rumford Press, Concord, New Hampshire. It was bound in cloth by Charles H. Bohn & Company, New York.

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